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THE NECESSITY OF *Divine Revelation*, AND The TRUTH of the CHRISTIAN REVELATION Asserted; in

Eight Sermons.

To which is prefix'd,

A PREFACE with some REMARKS on a Late Book, Intitled, *The Scheme of Literal Prophesy consider'd*, &c.

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TO

His Royal Highneſs,

GEORGE,

Prince of *WALES.*

SIR,

I Shou'd injure Your Royal HIGHNESS, if I imagin'd You wanted any Conviction theſe Papers can afford. But if

my mean Abilities can contribute any Thing to the Service of Religion, it becomes an Offering due to Your Royal HIGHNESS, from the Character in which I have the Honour to ſerve You.

THE Clergy wou'd eſteem themſelves happy, if Arguments on the Subject here treated were every where as unneceſſary, as they are in Your Royal HIGHNESS's Court. With much greater Satisfaction We ſhou'd exerciſe our Miniſtry in explaining

ing the Doctrines, recommending the Duties, and enforcing the Motives of the Goſpel. When the Foundation of a true Faith may generally be preſumed, Theſe, we know, are the proper Superſtructure we ſhou'd build upon it; the ordinary Chriſtian Food of which we are appointed Stewards and Diſpenſers. But when Poiſons are diſperſed among our People, and laïd in every one's Way, our Office will require us to provide Medicines as well as Meat, and ſupply them with Antidotes equal

to the Danger. When the Grounds of our Religion are openly attack'd; when the Authority on which its whole Obligation depends is diſputed, and Infidelity is prevailing as a Faſhion, ſome at leaſt among us may appear properly employ'd in repelling the Enemy. Your Royal HIGHNESS, we are aſſured, wiſhes Succeſs to every Hand engaged in this Service, and we bleſs God for the Influence of Your great Example in promoting it.

WE

WE ſollicit not the Countenance of the Great, or the Aſſiſtance of Authority, from any Diſtruſt of our Cauſe, or our Abilities to defend it. Our Cauſe is the Cauſe of God and his Chriſt, againſt which the *Gates of Hell ſhall not prevail*: Neither will the Labours of the Clergy be wanting in a juſt Defence of it. And if Providence ſhou'd call us to that Trial, we are prepared to ſuffer for it, as our Predeceſſors have done. But we may obſerve to Your

Royal HIGHNESS, and all who are in Authority, that *our Religion* is a Part, and a moſt valuable Part, of our Legal Properties. We may obſerve the Tendency of theſe Attempts, to unſettle Mens Minds from the Principles and Belief of all *Reveal'd Religion*; and leave every one to perſue what each ſhall think fit to call the Dictates of his *natural Reaſon.* We may obſerve what Confuſion theſe licentious Notions muſt produce, what Effects they muſt have on Morality, civil Peace, the Se-

Security and Influence of Government itſelf. Publick Wiſdom may ſurely be permitted, without the Imputation of unreaſonable Severity, to reſtrain Men from thus *ſcattering Arrows, Firebrands, and Death* amongſt us. His Sacred MAJESTY will, we doubt not, apply Remedies agreeable to His Wiſdom, and reſcue Himſelf and Your Royal HIGHNESS, from the terrible Proſpect of governing a People without *any Religion.*

WE

WE acknowledge, with humble Gratitude to GOD and His MAJESTY, the Protection our Eſtabliſhment enjoys under His gracious Adminiſtration; and rejoice in the Hopes Your Virtues give us, that this Bleſſing will be farther continued and confirmed to us and our Poſterity.

THAT the Dew of divine Benediction may deſcend on Your Royal HIGHNESS's Perſon and Family; That the Wiſdom of God may direct

direct, his Power preſerve, and the Graces of his Holy Spirit adorn You with every good and perfect Gift, is the daily Prayer of our Church, and offer'd with unfeign'd Sincerity,

By

Your Royal HIGHNESS's

Moſt Dutiful

Servant and Chaplain,

JOHN ROGERS.

PREFACE.

THE PREFACE.

WHILE the following Diſcourſes were in the Preſs, I received a Defence of the Diſcourſe of the Grounds and Reaſons, *&c. intitled* The Scheme of Literal Propheſy conſider'd, *&c. In my fifth Sermon I occaſionally diſpute one Point with the Author of* the Grounds and Reaſons, *&c.* viz. *Whether the Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles are ſo uſeleſs an Evidence, as he pretends, in our Inquiry whether* Jeſus Chriſt *was the Meſſiah foretold to, and expected by the* Jews: *And I was willing, in ſuch a ſhort View*

View as the Time permitted, to obſerve how far any Thing ſuggeſted by this new Piece, affected my Way of Reaſoning on that Queſtion.

I confeſs, I conſider'd that Author as arguing under the Perſon of a Jew, *who acknowledg'd the Expectation of a Meſſiah, founded on ſome preceding Predictions, but deny'd that Jeſus Chriſt had produced ſufficient Evidence of his being that Perſon. On this Supposition I obſerv'd,*

1ſt. *That the Nature of the Thing requires that this Perſon ſhou'd appear to be ſent,* or raiſed up, *by God, of which Miracles are the moſt unqueſtionable Proof that cou'd be given.*

2ly, *From ſeveral Paſſages in the Goſpels, I obſerv'd, that the Jews expected their Meſſiah ſhou'd be diſtinguiſh'd by the Power of working Miracles, as a propheſy'd Part of his Character. To which Places we may add* * What Sign

* John vi. 30, 31.

ſheweſt thou that we may believe? What doſt thou work? Our Fathers did eat Manna in the Wilderneſs. *Where they plainly challenge Chriſt to prove himſelf like to* Moſes *(as he had foretold the Meſſiah ſhould be) by performing ſome Miracle, equal to that of* Moſes, *in giving their Fathers Manna from Heaven. To them therefore Miracles were a ſpecifick Evidence, without which no one cou'd be acknowledg'd as the Meſſiah. This Argument, indeed, proves only, that Miracles were eſteem'd by the Jews a neceſſary Mark of that Perſon whom they expected. What Authority the Jews had for this Expectation, is another Inquiry. That they grounded it on preceding Propheſies, cannot be deny'd: And if they truly underſtood thoſe Propheſies, then the Concluſion goes farther, and the Miracles of* Jeſus *are one Evidence, that he was a Perſon long before foretold; and give all the Teſtimony to him that a propheſy'd Character, the leaſt capable of being counterfeited of any, cou'd give. And the Generality and Firmneſs of the Expectation itſelf, affords a* probable

Argu-

Argument that it was deduced from ſome authentick Expoſition of the Propheſies. This is a way of reaſoning uſed in other hiſtorical Inquiries, and allow'd to have Weight, where the Matter will admit it, and 'tis not plainly contradicted by any preceding Teſtimony.

But the Perſon *of the Jew ſeems now to be dropp'd, and we are taught, that no ſuch Character as a Meſſiah was foretold in any of the antient Propheſies: And, to cut off all Argument from the general Expectation of ſuch a Perſon prevailing among the Jews, 'tis averr'd, * that this Expectation was no earlier* than in or about the Time of Jeſus.

But, in the firſt Place, how does this Gentleman prove it no earlier? Why he affirms it; and there remaining to us no Jewiſh Writers for ſome Ages before, he is very ſure we cannot produce any that mention it. But ſince all the Jewiſh Writings about that Time mention it,

* Scheme of literal Propheſy conſider'd, &c. Cap. I.

with-

without the leaſt Intimation of its Novelty, or aſſigning any Author from whom it was lately derived, or any Date of its Commencement; this is a fair Preſumption that the Riſe of it was much older, and beyond Memory at that time. And ſince this Expectation was profeſſedly founded on the prophetick Writings, the Expoſition of thoſe Writings, from which it aroſe, muſt have been as old as the Expectation; and may, with Probability, be thought to have deſcended down from the prophetick Age, tho' 'twas more generally attended to near the Time of Jeſus. * *This Gentleman wou'd diſparage this way of arguing, as no better than the Papiſts Method of proving*

* The Expectation of a Meſſiah, as founded on the Prophets, appears not only from the Goſpels, but from the oldeſt Rabbinical Books, the Targums of *Jonathan* and *Onkelos*; the former, according to the Jews, was wrote before Chriſt, and the latter ſoon after. 'Tis pretended, indeed, that theſe are later, and much † *interpolated*: But if they are *interpolated*, it muſt have been done by the Jews, in whoſe Hands they were, for the early Chriſtians do not appear to have known them: And 'tis not probable, the Jews wou'd interpolate Acknowledgments ſo much in Favour of Chriſtianity, as that any of the Propheſies referr'd to by Chriſt or his Apoſtles did really relate to the Meſſiah.

† Scheme of literal Propheſy, &c. p. 16.

* *Tranſubſtantiation, who beginning at the Age in which it was profeſſedly taught, preſume thence backwards on a Tradition from the Apoſtles. But he will perceive a great Difference between them, when he obſerves, that the Proteſtants ſhew a continued Succeſſion of Chriſtian Writers, thro' ſeveral Centuries after the Apoſtles, who explain the Words of Chriſt in the Inſtitution of the Euchariſt in a figurative Senſe, as we do; which proves, not only that Tranſubſtantiation was not the Doctrine of the Chriſtian Church in thoſe Ages, but that the Doctrine which we affirm in oppoſition to it, was. Nay, we can aſſign the Time when, and the Perſons by whom the Doctrine of Tranſubſtantiation was firſt publiſh'd,* viz. *by* John Damaſcene *in the Eaſt, and by* Paſch. Radbertus *in the Weſtern Church. Here the Tradition itſelf is diſproved, and not merely by Silence, but by poſitive Evidence. Let this Gentleman then tell us, by whom the Expectation of a Meſſiah was firſt publiſh'd.*

* Pag. 65.

Let

Let him produce a Succeſſion of Jewiſh Writers, antecedent to the Time in which he allows that Expectation to have prevail'd, contradicting it, and the Interpretations of the Prophets on which it was founded: This will be ſomething to his Purpoſe: But ſince he cannot produce one, a wide Difference muſt be acknowledg'd between theſe Caſes, in the very Point of Argument; and therefore a Parity of Reaſon cannot lie from the one to the other. But were the Tradition in both Caſes upon an equal Foot, yet the different Character of the Doctrines deſtroys all Compariſon between them. The one is ſo evident a Falſhood, that it cannot, upon any Tradition, be admitted as the intended Senſe of Words, which we acknowledge to have been divinely inſpired. But this Author will never prove it equally impoſſible, that the Prophets ſhou'd intend the Senſe in which the Jews underſtood them, and from which they derived their Expectation of a Meſſiah.

But ſuppoſe this general Expectation, and the Expoſition of the Prophets from which it was derived, did obtain no earlier than he pretends. Is it impoſſible that a Propheſy which was not underſtood before, ſhou'd begin to be underſtood then? Many Reaſons might be given, why divine Wiſdom ſhou'd chooſe to deliver Propheſies in ſome Obſcurity. From this Gentleman's way of reaſoning I may ſuggeſt one. Wherever he apprehends a Propheſy to be plain, he immediately rejects it as a Forgery. Thus he rejects the Book of Daniel, *becauſe* it ſpeaks of Matters of Fact, in the way of Prophepheſy, with the Clearneſs of Hiſtory *. *And thinks,* the clear Reference in it to *Alexander* the Great, does itſelf evince that 'twas compoſed after the Conqueſts *of that Prince* †. *And in another Place he tells us,* The Punctuality *of the Predictions in it,* ſo uncommon to Propheſies, can be owing to nothing but the Time of its Compoſition; when the Au-

* Pag. 143. † Pag. 431.

thor cou'd very eaſily place the Things he treated of, in the order of Time in which they happened *. *If Punctuality and Clearneſs are ſuch certain Marks that a Propheſy is ſpurious, we muſt confeſs it agreeable to the Wiſdom of God, to involve what he intended to be receiv'd as a real, genuine Propheſy, in ſuch* † *Obſcurity as might ſecure it from ſo inſuperable a Suſpicion of Impoſture. But then, it ſeems, if the Propheſy is thus obſcure, it has no Meaning, and can ſignify nothing at all. But if it be poſſible for the Spirit of God to deliver Propheſies with ſome certain Meaning, and every Propheſy muſt be obſcure, to gain it the credit of being a real Propheſy, then God may deliver an obſcure Propheſy with ſome certain Meaning. And if it be obſcure, it may not be preſently underſtood, but lie a long Time in the*

* Pag. 147.

† The Right Reverend the Biſhop of *Litchfield* and *Coventry*'s Defence, &c. p. 407, & *ſeq.* has ſhewn from the Prophets themſelves, Declarations that ſeveral of their Propheſies were dark and unintelligible, and were to continue ſo, till about the Time of their Completion; and that God purpoſely conceal'd his Meaning in ambiguous and figurative Expreſſions.

dark. But when the Completion of it draws near, it is very reaſonable to imagine, that the Providence of God ſhou'd prepare Men for it by a greater Attention to the Propheſy; that it ſhou'd appear in more Light, and raiſe ſuch Expectations, as might diſpoſe Men to acknowledge the Event, when fulfilled. Suppoſing then, not granting, that the Expectation of the Jews, *and the Expoſitions of the Prophets on which it was founded, were no older than this Author pretends; yet it cannot be thence inferr'd, that theſe Expoſitions were not agreeable to the real Intention of the Propheſies, but the Preſumption will rather lie on the other Side.*

The Declarations of later Jews, *when they affirm the Expectation of a Meſſiah as foretold by the Prophets, are treated by this Gentleman as very inconſiderable Evidence; tho' great Streſs is laid by him on a ſingle Authority, diſowning, or even doubting of it. Thus* * R. Hillel's *Opinion, that no Meſſiah*

* Pag. 24, 25.

was

was foretold beſide Hezekiah, *is introduced with pompous Encomiums on his Character. And ſome Others are ſuppoſed to have approved his Doctrine,* (*tho' they profeſs'd the contrary to it*) *becauſe they did not* † excommunicate, or deem him an Apoſtate. Hillel *lived in the third Century, when more than two hundred Years Experience might well have convinced him of the Difficulties, which he and his Brethren labour'd under, in diſputing with the Chriſtians; while they acknowledg'd, that the Propheſies appeal'd to did really, in their original Intention, relate to a future Meſſiah. And is it any Wonder, that a zealous and obſtinate* Jew *ſhou'd be driven, as the laſt Refuge of a deſperate Cauſe, to cut the Knot which he cou'd not unty, and deny their Traditions, when he cou'd not otherwiſe anſwer the Chriſtian Arguments from them? Or that the good Intention of the Expedient ſhou'd procure him Excuſe from his Brethren, tho' they cou'd not agree*

† Pag. 25.

in Sentiments with him? This Perſon is the firſt Inſtance produced, of any Rabbi *declaring for this Opinion; neither does he appear to have had many Followers. The general Stream of* Jewiſh *Writers, both before and after him, profeſs the Expectation of a Meſſiah, as foretold in the ancient Propheſies; nay, in moſt of the ſame Propheſies which Chriſt and his Apoſtles had appeal'd to. And their Teſtimony is of the more Weight in this Caſe, becauſe they may be ſuppoſed unwilling Witneſſes. Nothing but a firm Conviction, that theſe Traditions were derived down to them from unqueſtionable Authority, cou'd have induced them to give their Adverſaries the Advantage of them. And this Preſumption is all we have Occaſion to infer from their Teſtimony. For I confeſs, I do not think the Concurrence of the Rabbinical Writers, how general ſoever, in the traditionary Application of a Propheſy, will amount to a* neceſſary Proof *that 'tis truly apply'd.*

For the Conviction of a Jew *these Traditions may properly be urg'd, as Arguments upon Conceſſion. And ſince both the* Diſcourſe of the Grounds and Reaſons, &c. *and the Defence of it inſiſt, with much Triumph, on any Paſſage in theſe Writers, which either in general diſowns the Prediction of a Meſſiah in the ancient Scriptures, or denies the Relation of any particular Propheſy to him; theſe Suggeſtions are fairly refuted, by ſhewing that they contradict the general Current of* Jewiſh *Tradition. We may hence alſo farther obſerve, that the Applications of the antient Propheſies to a future Meſſiah, whence Chriſt and his Apoſtles argue, were not Inventions of their own to ſerve a preſent Turn, but agreeable to the receiv'd Sentiments of that Nation. And ſince theſe Traditions muſt have obtain'd ſome conſiderable Time before the Birth of* Jeſus, *and no Date can be fixed for their Commencement, it is a* probable *Concluſion that they were derived down from the Prophetick Age.*

In

In explaining the Phraſeology of the ſacred Writers, the Peculiarities of their Style, the Cuſtoms they often refer to, and the uſual Signification of certain Types and Emblems in the Prophetick Language, the Remains of Jewiſh *Tradition tranſmitted to us in the Rabbinical Books, and eſpecially the earlieſt of them, are certainly proper Helps, and ſome of the beſt we have. But tho' the Aſſiſtances we receive from them be very great, and give both Light and Strength to the Evidences of Chriſtianity, and particularly in its Appeal to the ancient Propheſies; yet, with all Submiſſion to better Judgments, I neither conceive the Arguments ariſing from them ſtrong enough to ſtand ſingly by themſelves, nor ſo abſolutely neceſſary, but that our Concluſion may be proved without them.*

The Miracles wrought by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, I contend to be a clear, direct Proof of their Miſſion from God, and conſequently they aſſert the Authority of divine Teſtimony to their Application of the

the ancient Propheſies. I propoſe not this Way of Reaſoning as any Thing new; 'tis obvious enough, and was excellently and fully urged by the Right Reverend the Lord Biſhop of Litchfield *and* Coventry *in his* vi^th^ Chap. *to which his Anſwerer has given, in my Opinion, a very inſufficient Reply. Inſtead of refuting his Arguments, which he ought to have done if he cou'd, he has only produced the Aſſertions of ſome learned Men, that an Atteſtation from the Prophets is neceſſary to ſupport the Pretenſions of our Lord to the Character of the Meſſiah; we own it; and inſiſt, that the Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles lead us neceſſarily to the Acknowledgment of ſuch an Atteſtation. Here are Propheſies appeal'd to, in Proof that Jeſus Chriſt was a Perſon antiently foretold by the Spirit of God, under the Character of a Meſſiah, a great Prophet who ſhou'd come. Upon this a Queſtion ariſes, whether theſe Propheſies had, in their firſt Intention, any Relation to ſuch a Perſon; and what better Proof can be given or required*

of such Relation, than the Affirmation of the same Spirit, who is supposed to have dictated the Prophesy? The Argument in Form is this,

What God affirms to have been intended by his Spirit in any Prophesy, that certainly was intended in it: But

God affirms, that in the Propheſies apply'd by Chriſt and his Apoſtles, his Spirit intended to foretell a Meſſiah. Ergo,

The Minor *is proved thus,*

What a Perſon or Perſons, proved to be inſpired by God, affirm, that God affirms: But

Chriſt and his Apoſtles are proved to be inſpired by God, and affirm, that in the Propheſies which they apply, the Spirit intended to foretell a Meſſiah. Ergo, &c.

For

For Proof of the Inſpiration of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, we appeal to the Miracles wrought by them, the moſt unexceptionable Evidence any Perſon can give, that he is ſent by God, and ſpeaks with his Authority. I can perceive no Defect in this Argument, and think it not the worſe for being plain and ſhort. If it be ſhewn impoſſible for the Propheſy to have had ſuch Intention, it is confeſs'd Miracles will not prove it, becauſe Miracles cannot prove an Impoſſibility: But if, upon any poſſible Suppoſition, the Propheſy might have ſuch Intention, the Aſſertion of a Perſon, whoſe Miſſion from God is atteſted by Miracles, is a juſt Proof of ſuch Intention. That 'tis poſſible to underſtand the Propheſies in Queſtion with ſuch Intention appears, becauſe they have been and are ſo underſtood, both by Jews *and Chriſtians; and the Author of* Grounds and Reaſons *finds ſuch Intention aſſerted by probable Arguments at leaſt, ariſing from the Matter, the Expreſſions, and Circumſtances of the Propheſies themſelves,*

and

and Traditions, whoſe Beginning cannot be aſſign'd, affirming it. The Diſpute between him and his Adverſaries is not, ſo far as I apprehend, whether it be poſſible the Propheſies might have ſuch Intention, but whether ſuch Intention can be made to appear to any one inclined to conteſt it; and when the Intention is affirm'd by a Perſon, who gives the beſt Evidence of his Inſpiration that can be given, I think the Queſtion is fairly decided by divine Authority.

This Gentleman ſeem'd, as I obſerved before, to aſſume the Perſon of a Jew, *one who own'd the Inſpiration of the antient Propheſies; and agreeably he tells us, that we ought regularly to be firſt Converts to* Judaiſm, *and then proceed, upon the Principles of that Religion, to examine the Evidences of the Chriſtian. In debating this Queſtion, therefore, I ſuppoſed his Objections to Chriſt's Allegations of the antient Propheſies to have been made by a* Jew, *and obſerve, that, having from our Lord's Miracles the ſame (I might ſay greater)*

Rea-

Reaſon to believe that God ſpake by Chriſt, as he had to believe that God ſpake by the Prophets; He had the ſame (or greater) Authority for the Expoſition or Application of the Propheſies, as he had for the Propheſies themſelves. But the Argument will equally conclude, if we change the Perſon to a Gentile. *For ſuppoſe a* Gentile, *upon the Sight or Aſſurance of Chriſt's Miracles, to have been convinced of his Miſſion from God; as the* Conſiderer of the Scheme of literal Propheſy, *&c. acknowledges he might be. He tells us, that* * Had Jeſus Chriſt come as a Perſon ſent with a new Revelation from God, and perform'd Miracles as Credentials of his Miſſion, he wou'd have had a Right to have been attended to, and try'd upon that Foot; *and if no internal Objection had appear'd againſt his Doctrine,* his Miracles ought to have determin'd Men to have believ'd on him. *Well then; this Convert finds* Jeſus *to have aſſumed the Character of the Meſſiah, a*

* Pag. 310, 311.

Per-

Perſon ſuppoſed to be foretold in the Jewiſh *Prophets. We acknowledge it requiſite, that this Claim ſhou'd appear duly ſupported; and are at Liberty to ſuppoſe, that no Contradiction to any Propheſy is aſſign'd, in Diſproof of this Claim; but that the Queſtion lies before him, under the Difficulties ſuggeſted by our modern Objecters. Several Propheſies are appeal'd to, as predicting this Meſſiah; and are acknowledg'd by the* Jews *to have had that Intention: But when he comes to examine theſe Propheſies, we will ſuppoſe (with all the Advantage to the Objecters that may be) that he finds no clear expreſs Mention of ſuch a Perſon, but that ſuch Intention is collected only from ſome obſcure Paſſages, or from ſome typical, allegorical, or ſecondary Senſe of the Words. In ſhort, that it does not appear to him from the Words themſelves, that either the* Jews, *or Chriſt, had any certain indubitable Grounds for ſuch Application. Suppoſe all this, I ſay, yet when he obſerves the Ground he already ſtands on, that he has the fulleſt Proof*

that

*that can be given, that Jeſus Chriſt, who affirms this Expoſition, is a Perſon ſent by God, and who ſpeaks with his Authority, might he not juſtly argue thus? — "It is not impoſſible, but "the divine Wiſdom might intend to de- "liver theſe Propheſies with ſome Ob- "ſcurity; nay, there are obvious Rea- "ſons which might induce him to do ſo. "God certainly knows, whether he in- "tended thus to foreſignify this Event "or not. If he affirms the Intention, "can I diſpute his Authority, and "tell him he did not intend it? And "ſince the Miracles of Chriſt give me "the utmoſt Aſſurance of his divine "Miſſion, what he declares, God de- "clares; and I can no more doubt the "Truth of his Expoſition, that I can "doubt the Veracity of God". No internal Objection, but a manifeſt Impoſſibility in the Aſſertion, can invalidate this Reaſoning; and ſuch, I preſume, will not be produced. But till it is produced, this Gentleman muſt be contented to retract alſo his * Parallel*

* Pag. 316.

between the Papiſts *Proof of Tranſubſtantiation by their Miracles, and our Proof of the Intention of the* Jewiſh *Propheſies from the Miracles of Chriſt. For Tranſubſtantiation is a Doctrine incapable of being proved by Miracles; ſo manifeſt a Falſhood muſt overbear the utmoſt Evidence that can be produced for Inſpiration. But the Caſe is quite otherwiſe here. The Point in Queſtion is, whether an antient Propheſy, ſuppoſed to have been dictated by the Spirit of God, was intended to preſignify a Meſſiah, or not. It is diſputed* pro *and* con *by probable Arguments, ariſing from ſuch Lights and Circumſtances, as are uſually call'd in to illuſtrate antient obſcure Writings: And we think, the greater Weight of theſe Arguments is with us. But ſuppoſing the Ballance only equal, or even inclining againſt us; yet when we have the beſt Proof, which in the Nature of the Thing can be given us, that God himſelf affirms the Intention we contend for, the Scale is turn'd with ſo vaſt a Preponderancy, as leaves no farther Room for Doubt.*

If

If these are really Prophesies, God must be consider'd as the Author of them, and must certainly be the best Expositor of his own Meaning in them. And since Miracles are the strongest and most unexceptionable Evidence of any Person's Inspiration by God, if a Person, whose Mission is so attested, affirms a particular Meaning, God himself must be understood to affirm it. This single Argument, unless it can be shewn to be barr'd by a manifest Impossibility in the Matter affirm'd, is sufficient to carry us thro' every Question which can arise on this Subject. It asserts not only the Application of the Jewish *Prophesies, to which it bears Witness, but the Authority of the Prophesies themselves. It supports and confirms all Evidences* a priori, *gives Strength even to probable Conjectures of the Intention of the Prophets, and removes every Difficulty suggested against them. In particulnr, it gives a full, and perhaps the best, Answer to that Objection of the Adversary.* —— That if we allow the Authority of the *Jewish* Traditions, they will

prove more than we desire; that the Person foretold by the Prophets was a temporal Deliverer, and not such a Messiah as we contend for. · *For when their Tradition for the Prediction of a Messiah is affirm'd, and the particular Character in which they expected him to appear, is rejected by divine Authority, we have very good Reason to believe them right in one Tradition, and mistaken in the other. I do not offer this in Disparagement of any other Reply, that may be given. But I am inclined to think, that whoever will attentively exmine the Grounds upon which he admits one Part of the Tradition, and rejects the other, will find himself principally to rest on this Argument: And that if our Lord had appear'd in the Figure of a temporal Prince, and confirm'd the literal Meaning of those Propheſies, which are understood of a Messiah, and speak of him under that Character, he wou'd readily have admitted that Meaning.*

For my own Part, I scruple not to own, that I therefore believe the Jewish *Re-*

Revelation; becauſe I find it confirm'd by the Chriſtian. *For tho' the* Jewiſh *Revelation is ſupported by direct Proofs of its own, yet theſe Proofs wou'd not have appear'd with the ſame Light and Force, if they had not been ſtrengthen'd by the Teſtimony of the Goſpel Revelation. I am convinced of the divine Authority of Jeſus Chriſt by full Evidence, and eſpecially by the Miracles which atteſt it. I here fix my Foot, and under this Conviction conſider what He has taught. He affirms the* Jewiſh *Revelation in general, and the View and Intention of ſeveral particular Propheſies in it. I diſcern nothing impoſſible in his Aſſertions; nothing that can oblige me to retract my Belief of his divine Authority, and therefore I am aſſured by that Authority, of the Truth of what He affirms. In a general View of that Revelation He propoſes to me, I am pleas'd to ſee a wonderful Scheme of Providence derived down, with great Conſiſtency, from the Beginning of the World, and gradually open'd thro' a long Succeſſion of Ages. I obſerve, with Satis-*

faction, the Evidences ariſing to this Syſtem, from the direct Proofs of the Jewiſh *Religion, the Import, the Rites and Inſtitutions of that Revelation, and the Traditions of that People; But all theſe are but acceſſional Supports, to Concluſions already proved by divine Authority; without which, theſe other Arguments wou'd have given but a faint and uncertain Light; or, at leaſt, wou'd have wanted that Clearneſs and Force, with which they now appear.*

A Jew, *indeed, wou'd naturally begin at the other End of the Argument, and proceed from his Conviction of that Revelation which he had before receiv'd, to examine the* Chriſtian. *His firſt Inquiry wou'd be, whether they were conſiſtent; his next, what Teſtimony the former bore to the latter: And while he was in this Search, the Import of the Propheſies, Traditions, and whatever other Lights might aſcertain the Intention of them, wou'd be proper Subjects of his Conſideration. If he perceiv'd an irreconcileable Contradiction be-*

tween

tween the two Revelations, he cou'd not acknowledge both; and if he adhered to the former, he muſt reject the latter. But if he had no other Objection, beſides ſome Difficulties and Uncertainties in the Application of the Propheſies appeal'd to, when he attended to the direct Proofs of Chriſt's divine Authority, that Authority muſt over-rule all Doubts or Scruples of that Kind, which cou'd remain with him. So that his Inquiry wou'd end, where mine began, and both wou'd ultimately reſt on the ſame Foundation, the divine Authority of Chriſt.

If the Premiſſes in this Way of Reaſoning are allow'd, the Concluſion, ſo far as I can perceive, follows by clear and neceſſary Conſequence from them. I am not wanting in a juſt Deference to the Sentiments of learned Men; But when, upon the beſt Attention in my Power, I am convinced an Argument is concluſive, I cannot, upon any Authority, give it up as inconcluſive. What my learned and worthy Friend the Dean

of Chicheſter *ſays, is certainly very true, viz.* What a Prophet has not ſpoken, Miracles will not prove him to have ſpoken: *For neither Miracles, nor any Thing elſe, can prove an Impoſſibility. But when the Queſtion is only about the Meaning and Intention of what a Prophet has ſpoken, if an Intention be aſſign'd, which is not only poſſible, but ſupported by ſeveral probable Arguments, the Affirmation of divine Authority, aſſured to us by Miracles or any other proper Evidence, is the moſt deciſive Proof, that the Nature of the Subject is capable of.*

My Diſpute with the Author of Grounds and Reaſons, &c. *is confined to a ſingle Point; and I can obſerve nothing more in his Defender, by which any Concluſion of mine appears to be affected. When he publiſhes his threaten'd Treatiſe of Miracles, I may perhaps find my ſelf more concern'd. In the mean time I doubt not but the worthy Perſons he oppoſes, will do themſelves and him Juſtice.*

But

But in his XIII *Chapter, where he opens his* Scheme of Liberty, *he comes within the compaſs of a Subject, which I have formerly conſider'd with ſome Attention. I ſhall therefore give him my Reflections on this Part of his Performance; to which I am the rather induced, becauſe the Cenſure I paſs in the following Diſcourſes on theſe Schemes, as tending only to Licentiouſneſs and Confuſion, appears fully confirm'd in it. And if I uſe him with ſomewhat leſs Ceremony than I have hitherto done, the ſcurrilous Inſolence, with which he here treats a learned and venerable Prelate of our Church, will be my Excuſe.*

He breaks forth into Reproaches againſt the Biſhop, for preſuming to hope for the Royal Protection and Countenance of his Majeſty, and the Aſſiſtance of thoſe employ'd in the Adminiſtration; *for thoſe, or the like, Paſſages in his Lordſhip's Dedication are what, I ſuppoſe, he reflects on, as* † calling in the Aid of the civil Magiſtrate. *And ſurely*

* Pag. 392.

ſuch

ſuch Aid his Lordſhip might reaſonably call for. This Gentleman muſt know, that our Religion is incorporated into our civil Conſtitution, and become a legal Part of our Property; as much ſecured to us by the Oaths of our Princes, and the Authority and Sanctions of our Laws, as our Lives, or Fortunes. On this Argument, we all know, the Revolution, and the happy Settlement conſequent to it were founded; and we are firmly aſſured, that His Majeſty's royal Wiſdom and Juſtice will not permit, nor his Councellors adviſe, the Subverſion of that Foundation.

The Chriſtian Religion did not obtain the Favour of civil Eſtabliſhments, without due Conſideration. It had been diſputed near four Hundred Years; every Objection that Perſons, of as much Learning and Parts as this Writer can pretend to, cou'd ſuggeſt, had been heard and refuted: And then, upon full Conviction of its Divine Authority, and the Excellency of its Rules, it receiv'd that Encouragement, which Civil Power will ever

ever find it neceſſary to give to ſome Religion or other. And does he think theſe Concluſions are all to be reverſed, publick Conſtitutions unframed, and all Laws ſuſpended, as often as any petulant Scribler ſhall have an itch to ſhew his Skill in Argument, and revive the Controverſy again? Are Queſtions of this Importance to be kept open for ever? And is it not poſſible for us ever to know when we have attained Truth and Conviction? If * the Liberty *he contends for* were eſtabliſh'd, Truth, *he thinks,* muſt needs have the Advantage over Error and Falſehood. *Chriſtianity has ſtood the full Trial of Debate, under all the* Liberty *of Oppoſition to it, that could be deſired, and has* prevail'd. *We have then this Circumſtance to add to the direct Evidences of its* Truth: *And muſt we never reſt in our Concluſion, ſo long as there is one Infidel left, who has Vanity enough to think he has ſomething to offer, not conſider'd before? A juſt Reply is not, and will not be, wanting to all he has ſaid, or can ſay; but while our Laws*

* Pag. 413.

con-

continue in Force, he muſt not expect they ſhould ſtand ſtill, and be only idle Spectators of the Conteſt. He is pleas'd to think, that whoever advances any Principles contrary to his, (i. e.) *contends for any religious Eſtabliſhments*, * ought to be made an Example, *That if he* contradicts what the Laws of his Country deem the Goſpel, all Advantages ſhou'd be taken againſt him from thoſe Laws, and particularly, that the R. R. Prelate he diſputes with, ſhou'd be thus taken to task *for his Doctrines. This it ſeems wou'd be no Perſecution, but* † a Propoſal highly juſt to be put in Execution. *But if the Laws, which he openly affronts, were to be executed upon himſelf; if any Reſtraint ſhou'd be laid on the Liberty he aſſumes of publiſhing Notions ſubverſive of the Chriſtian and all reveal'd Religion, and which manifeſtly tend to introduce the utmoſt Confuſion, civil and religious; we ſhou'd preſently, I doubt not, have an Out-cry of Tyranny, Perſecution, and Inquiſition. If he were ſo throughly convinced, as he pre-*

* Pag. 398. † Pag. 399.

tends,

tends, of the Truth of his Notions, and * his Duty to publiſh them, *he ſhou'd not, methinks, be ſo very apprehenſive of a little Diſcouragement. The Chriſtian Religion, he knows, has ſtood firm thro' the moſt enraged Perſecutions of ſecular Power; and been atteſted by the Blood of innumerable Martyrs. And notwithſtanding his mean and diſingenuous Reflection on the Clergy of this Church, as Men ſo attach'd to their* Preferments, *that they wou'd* † ſubſcribe to any thing *rather than part with them, he may be able to recollect within his own Memory, or late Hiſtory can recount to him, numerous Examples among them of a Courage ſuperior to all Impreſſions of ſecular Terror. And he may aſſure himſelf, they will appear with as much Zeal and Activity againſt Libertiniſm and Anarchy, as they ſhew'd then againſt Tyranny; and, if the Occaſion requir'd it, wou'd be as little moved by any Fear of Suffering, as they were then. And I may obſerve to this Gentleman, that the Reſolution and Conſtancy of its Profeſſors in ſuffer-*

* Pag. 408. † Pag. 400.

ing

ing for any Cauſe, is no inconſiderable Argument in its Favour. Before he pretends to compare his Religion with the Chriſtian, he muſt produce ſome Ballance to the Teſtimony of its Martyrs. A Confeſſor or two would be a mighty Ornament to his Cauſe. If he expects to convince us that he is in earneſt, and believes himſelf, he ſhould not decline giving us this Proof of his Sincerity; what will not abide this Trial, we ſhall ſuſpect to have but a poor Foundation. And when we ſee him ſo terribly frighted with Apprehenſion of the very gentle Reſtraints of our Laws, calling out to have the Edge of them turned, and his Adverſaries † ſingled out and made Examples by them, *we can hardly think him in earneſt in what he has wrote; or that he means any Thing more, than to ſhew us a Specimen of his Parts and Reading, to give vent to his great Plethory of Knowledge, teaze the Clergy, and divert himſelf with a little Diſputation.*

† P. 398.

Nay,

Nay, but He has a ſerious Propoſal *to make to us; and* * O what Piety, and true Honour of God, what Virtue, Order, and Peace would prevail in the World, if Men would but receive it! *He has collected, good Man, a Treaſure of* † Pearls *for us, but he is afraid we ſhould bite him, and therefore contents himſelf, at preſent, with only deſiring us to throw away all the Religion we have; and then if we will come to him, and give him good Words, he has* ‖ Creeds, *and every Thing elſe we can want, ready provided for us. But* firſt, *we expect better Arguments from him, than he has yet produced, before we part with our preſent Religion. And then, ſince he allows that* § all Projects, Deſigns, or Schemes are to be judged good or bad by the Effects, *we beg leave to obſerve to him, that the Chriſtian Religion has been approved by the Experience of many Centuries. That there are indeed and have been wicked Men and* turbulent Spirits, *whoſe Luſts and Paſſions would not be reſtrain'd within the Rules of that Re-*

* P. 414, 415. † P. 408. ‖ 418. § P. 411.

ligion,

ligion, we confeſs and lament; and ſhould be oblig'd to any one who could tell us how to prevent it; but can ſee no Reaſon to hope that Things would be much better'd by his Scheme. It would have been a great Satisfaction to us, if he had referr'd to ſome Age and Country in which his Scheme had obtain'd, and produc'd thoſe glorious Effects he promiſes us from it. I believe our own Hiſtory can furniſh him with a Precedent, the neareſt to it of any in the World. In the Days of the great Rebellion, our Fathers ſaw this Univerſal Liberty *in its full Latitude and Extent, when every one was left to chooſe or deviſe his own Religion, and to have any or none juſt as he pleaſed, provided he would renounce that before eſtabliſh'd. Among the innumerable Projects then advanc'd, there was not one but pretended to rectify all that had ever been amiſs: Each was* † the true and only Scheme by which the World ought to be regulated: *And if Men would but* come into the Propoſal, *each promi-*

† P. 413.

ſed

ſed them * Happineſs in this World and the next, *and all the fine Things this Gentleman has provided for us. But whoever reads the Annals of thoſe miſerable Times, and attends to the Complaints of all ſerious Men of all Parties and Diſtinctions, will find very little Inclination to have the Experiment tried over again. And, among thoſe Complaints, I beg leave particularly to obſerve one from Mr.* Pryn, *and others who had concurr'd in the Councils of thoſe Times, and the Subverſion and Confuſion they had produced. That Popery never got more Ground, nor prevail'd faſter than it did then. None labour'd with more Aſſiduity to advance the Scheme of* Univerſal Liberty, *than the Emiſſaries of that Religion. The* Chriſtian Moderator, *a Treatiſe intirely built upon that Scheme, was wrote by one of them: And we have good Evidence, that the Project of our Troubles was laid by that Church, and this Engine pitch'd upon as the moſt effectual to execute it. How far the*

* P. 415.

Hand of that Enemy is concern'd in the preſent Attempt to revive that Scheme, we can only conjecture; but the Service they do, and muſt receive from it, is apparent to all obſerving Men.

But perhaps this Gentleman has corrected the Defects and Inconſiſtencies of thoſe former Projects; his is, what it pretends to be, the moſt harmleſs and beneficial Overture, that ever was made to the World. They were ſo weak as to allow ſome Sort of a publick Miniſtry, with Allotments of Revenue for its Support, and gather'd themſelves into Congregations, and a Kind of Churches: But the Plan *he has to offer,* † for the information of our Makers of Laws for regulating Society, *is free from all theſe Imperfections. The* Religion *he has deviſed for us,* * is a Matter purely perſonal; and the Knowledge of it to be obtain'd by perſonal Conſideration, *independently on any Guides, Teachers, or Authority. Why this was their very Scheme;*

† p. 417. * p. 416.

but unleſs human Nature cou'd be chang'd into ſomething very different from what it is, it was and ever will be impoſſible to execute it. Their Theory *was as finely imagin'd, as his can be; and his is as incapable of being reduced to Practice, as theirs was. He might, perhaps, change the Way of ſpeaking, and what were then call'd Dictates of the Spirit, might under his* Plan *be called Dictates of Reaſon; but both wou'd mean much the ſame thing; and his Reaſoners wou'd be as weak, as ignorant, and as confident, and in a very little time as great Enthuſiaſts in Religion, as they were: And while each acted as he tells us* ‖ they ought *to act,* and publiſh'd ſuch of their Thoughts and Opinions as they deem'd beneficial to Men, and tending to their Peace and Welfare, *(as to be ſure every one wou'd deem or might pretend to deem his own) the ſame Chaos and Diſtraction that prevail'd upon their Scheme, wou'd as certainly prevail upon his.* Truth *indeed in the End did then happily* prevail over Error, *tho'*

‖ p. 408.

*we are not ſo confident as this * Writer that it always will do ſo. The Body of the Nation, convinced of their Deluſion by thoſe Projects of Liberty they had purſued, and wearied with being toſs'd to and fro without finding any Ground to reſt on, were glad to rebuild what they had demoliſh'd, and purchaſe their old Conſtitution again, tho' at the Price of all their Plunder and Sacrilege. This was the Event then: But God only knows what Iſſue a ſecond Experiment might have. This Gentleman's Scheme wou'd as ſurely and as effectually ſubvert and pull down, as theirs did. But we know we have a vigilant and powerful Enemy, acting by ſubtil and united Counſels, who watches every Breach in our Conſtitution; and, if all our Incloſures were now to be thrown down, might, with the favour of other incidents, enter upon us with more Advantage than he cou'd do then. God, we truſt, whoſe Goodneſs deliver'd this Church and Nation, from the Miſeries brought on them by that former*

* p. 413.

Project of Liberty, will protect us from the Evils threatned by this: And we doubt not, but the Wisdom of our Superiors will guard us against the Return of the one, or the Admission of the other.

I may observe of both Schemes, (if they differ any more than in Words) that they proceed on these fundamental Mistakes; the One, that God has promis'd to every Christian an infallible Guidance of his Spirit: The Other, that every Man left to himself wou'd reason justly, judge truly, and act agreeably. If human Nature were really in this State of Perfection, there wou'd be little Occasion for Laws, Government, or Authority in the World. But the Case in Fact is quite otherwise. And publick Constitutions, if they will do any Good, must consider Mankind as they really are, and, taken in the gross, ever will be, weak, ignorant, passionate, and conceited; and make suitable Provisions both for their Direction and Restraint. And tho' no Man ought, upon any Authority, to believe Contradictions, or profess an Assent to evident Falshoods; yet in Que-

ſtions where he muſt in the Event be determin'd by ſome Authority or other, he may reaſonably prefer the Authority appointed by publick Wiſdom, and may juſtly be requir'd to do ſo. I appeal to this Gentleman himſelf, whether he can ſeriouſly think the Bulk of Mankind capable of examining, with that Accuracy his Scheme ſuppoſes, the Chriſtian, His, or any other Religion; of debating the Proofs, Objections, and Replies; and collecting the proper Concluſion from the Whole. The Wiſdom of God has, with great Condeſcention, adapted the Rules and Evidences of the Chriſtian Religion, to the general Capacities of Mankind. As the Goſpel was preach'd to the Poor, *ſo it was offer'd to their Faith by Proofs proper for their Conviction, plain ſenſible Evidences of its divine Authority. Its preſent Credibility, as to outward Proofs, depends on the Tradition of thoſe Evidences, for which he who is not capable of deducing it regularly down by his own Inquiry, muſt neceſſarily have Recourſe to Authority; and if 'tis affirm'd to him by Perſons, to whoſe Knowledge and*

and Fidelity he has no juſt Objection, he has all the Proof that 'tis poſſible for one in his Circumſtances to have; and his private Judgment may juſtly reſt on it. This Gentleman's Addreſs to Perſons of this Character (i. e.) *the greater Part of Mankind, amounts only to a Perſuaſion to quit their preſent Guides, and truſt themſelves with him. They are manifeſtly unable to form a Judgment, either of the Arguments by which he endeavours to ſubvert our Religion, or eſtabliſh his own; whether they adhere to us, or go to him, they muſt unavoidably rely either on his or our Authority, for the Truth of thoſe Suggeſtions on which their Concluſion depends; and we preſume our Word may go as far as his. But perhaps he intends only the Satisfaction of Perſons of Learning and Study, and the* * Information *of thoſe in publick Authority,* when they make Laws for regulating Society. *But by all theſe Perſons, the Queſtion he propoſes has been fully conſider'd, and concluded long before he was born: They are perfectly ſatisfy'd*

* Pag. 416.

in the Truth of their Religion, and their Duty and Intereſt to protect it from all Inſults; and upon mature Deliberation have made Laws for its Eſtabliſhment, and Defence againſt all Schemes *that wou'd ſubvert it. And will he refuſe them that Liberty, he pretends to aſſert to all Men, and not ſuffer them to act according to their Conſcience and Conviction? Or is it impoſſible for them only of all Mankind to have either Conſcience or Conviction?*

Well, but " *in his preſent* Capacity, *he* " *offers his Propoſal* * only by way of " Perſuaſion: *He wou'd not for the World* " † ſingle out and make Examples *of any* " *who differ from him. And really his is* " *a moſt admirable Project,* ‖ the true and " only Scheme by which the World ought " to be regulated: *And O how happy it* " *wou'd make us if we wou'd but come into* " *it!*" *But ſince he is only upon Terms of* Perſuaſion, *we hope we may refuſe his Scheme, if we do not like it. We preſume we have a much better of our own, whoſe*

* Pag. 415. † Pag. 398. ‖ Pag. 413.

good

good Effects we have long approved; and as for his, we muſt be plain to tell him, we have been undone by it once already, which we think enough for Experiment, and deſire to be excuſed from a ſecond Trial. We can apprehend no uſe it can be apply'd to, but Subverſion: *And if he knows any People who want to be thrown into Confuſion, and deſtroy'd, he may recommend it as a moſt effectual Preſcription for their Purpoſe. For Root and Branch Work, there is no Engine like it. Let it be but looſe in its full Activity, and it will level all before it, and demoliſh every Society, civil or religious, in the World.*

Nay, but we wrong him; for he expreſly allows a civil Magiſtrate, tho' under this Reſtraint, that * nothing be inforced by civil Sanctions but only the Law of Nature. *But I am afraid ſome Free-thinker or other will aſſert this to be a* Perſonal Matter *too, and then the Magiſtrate will have nothing to do with*

* Pag. 414.

it.

it. I ſuppoſe this Law of Nature *is the Law of Reaſon; and if we take Revelation out of the Hypotheſis, as I preſume this Gentleman will give us Leave to do, the Convictions of Conſcience will be nothing elſe but practical Concluſions of Reaſon: And if the Convictions of Conſcience are a* perſonal Matter, *the Concluſions of Reaſon will be ſo too; and the ſame Arguments which exclude the Magiſtrate from meddling with one, will equally exclude him from the other; and ſo, for ought I ſee, he will have nothing at all to do. Might not any one inclined to carry on the Scheme of* univerſal Liberty, *ask this Gentleman what Authority any other Man had to preſcribe his Concluſions to him, and who gave him that Authority? Might he not obſerve, that his own Reaſon was his only Rule and Guide, and the Concluſions of it his* Law of Nature? *That he was no farther under any other Man's Direction, than he cou'd be prevail'd on by Argument and Perſuaſion, and then he himſelf was the ſole and ultimate Judge of his own Conviction; and as he did not preſcribe his* Law of Nature *to other People, he ſaw*

no

no Reaſon why they ſhou'd preſcribe their Law of Nature *to him? But we will take his Scheme of Government in the Terms given, without putting him to the Difficulty of aſſigning an Original for it, conſiſtent with his Principles. The Magiſtrate, it ſeems, muſt be confined to preſcribe or* enforce nothing *but the* Law of Nature; *beyond this he muſt have no Authority, and conſequently can lay no Obligation. But who muſt be Judge of this* Law of Nature *to be enacted? If whatever the Magiſtrate ſhall think or pronounce the* Law of Nature, *is to be enacted and acknowledg'd as ſuch, we had e'en as good leave him to his own Diſcretion without this Reſtraint. If the Subjects are to be the Judges in this Caſe, then whenever any one thinks, or (which to human Inſpection is the ſame) pretends to think the Rule enforced not to be a* Law of Nature, *he is diſcharg'd from all Obligation; and, in my Apprehenſion, might as well be left without any Magiſtrate. It may be, this Gentleman will point out preciſely the* Law of Nature *to be enforced. But is he ſure every Body elſe will*

will approve his Syſtem? Suppoſe the Magiſtrate himſelf ſhou'd differ from him, in judging of ſome Law of Nature; *muſt He lay aſide his Authority, and go to diſputing with him, and not preſume to act according to his own Convictions, till He can prevail for his Approbation? But when He has ſatisfy'd him, the ſame Trouble will ariſe to him from others, who have as good Pretenſions to direct, and hold the Hand of the Magiſtrate from enforcing any thing, as he has. If nothing is to be enforced, till every one approves it, I doubt nothing will be enforced at all, but every Man muſt be left to do what is right in his own Eyes. This indeed wou'd be* univerſal Liberty, *but the Magiſtrate will be apt to call it* Licentiouſneſs, *and think the Authority given him in Words to be in Reality nothing at all; and may juſtly reſent the Affront offer'd him by theſe Projecters, who, in their Schemes of Liberty, ſuppoſe every Man fit to be left to his own Concluſions and Conduct, except thoſe in publick Authority, and thoſe who defend it, who are generally repreſented*

in

in every Argument either as Knaves or Fools.

In ſhort, in all this Gentleman has offer'd in Defence or Recommendation of his Propoſal, *his Invectives againſt Authority, and his Declamations on the mighty Bleſſings he has prepared for us, He has only ſtaged over the common Track of Projectors, and ſaid nothing but what has been long ſince conſider'd and anſwered, to the Satisfaction of all reaſonable Men. And if any of the* † ingenious Perſons, *in whoſe Words he takes upon to* rebuke the Biſhop, *have either, to make room for ſome Project of their own, or in favour to ſome other Man's, gone too far into the disbanding Scheme, and making* Religion a perſonal Matter, *I hope they will review their Notions of Liberty, and ſtop ſhort of his Latitude; which is manifeſtly ſubverſive of all Order and Polity, and can no more conſiſt with civil, than with religious, Society. All the Liberty that can conſiſt*

† P. 392.

with

with Government or Society, I would aſſert as earneſtly as they can do; but at the ſame time, I think it equally my Duty, to contend for ſuch Authority as is neceſſary to it. The Liberty of private Judgment in Religion, I acknowledge to be an inherent Right of every Man, and confirm'd to every Chriſtian by the Goſpel; neither do I perſuade any Man to be more reſign'd to Authority, than the Nature of the Queſtion before him, his own Capacities, and the Ends of Society require. As Chriſtianity is by its Inſtitution a ſocial Religion, the Liberty of each Individual muſt be under ſuch Reſtraints, as the Nature and End of ſuch a Society neceſſarily demand. Strictly ſpeaking indeed, the Liberty of private Judgment or Opinion, cannot be taken away, or reſtrain'd; but an unbounded Liberty of publiſhing that Judgment, can be challeng'd from no Claim of Nature, no Rule of the Goſpel; nor reconciled to the Order, or even the Being of a Society, founded upon a certain Syſtem of Doctrines and Rules, as the Chriſtian Church is. If any one is required

quired by proper Authority, to profeſs his Belief or Opinion on any Article, He is certainly bound as an honeſt Man to make ſuch Profeſſion, according to his own Sentiments and Convictions whatever they are, and ought to be allowed to do it with Impunity. But without ſome Call of this Nature, there appears no general Obligation either of Reaſon or Religion, which requires a Man to publiſh his Sentiments, and ſet up for a Teacher and Converter of others to them; eſpecially in Oppoſition to publick Eſtabliſhments. In Chriſtian Religion the Apoſtle's Rule is, † Haſt thou Faith? have it to thyſelf; *and if any Man will be obtruding his Singularities, and thereby* * making Diviſions among us, *we are under his Direction* * to mark ſuch Perſon and avoid him; *and, conſequently, the Church or Chriſtian Society may declare him to be* avoided. *And as to the Magiſtrate, He certainly owes Juſtice and Protection to all his Subjects; neither do we deſire he ſhould*

† Rom. xiv. 22. * Rom. xvi. 17.

afflict

afflict or punish any for his mere Opinion, or the Persuasions of his Conscience. But Marks of Favour and Encouragement, he cannot be deny'd the common Privilege of bestowing as he pleases, and may surely be allow'd to give them to that Religion, which his own Convictions and the deliberate Conclusions of publick Wisdom have approved. And this Encouragement and Protection may be assured to it, under the same legal Tenure and Claim, that any other Right derived from publick Favour may. If a Jew, *a* Turk, *or* Heretick *will be content with the quiet Enjoyment of his own Conscience, let it be indulged him; neither wou'd we have him* * beaten into the Gospel, or the Church. *But if he will openly affront and oppose the Establish'd Religion; if he will publish Schemes and Projects, for the Subversion of the Church and the Gospel, he appears under another Character; and may be consider'd as the Aggressor, an Invader of settled Rights, a Disturber*

* Pag. 398.

ber of publick Peace; and if he may not be beaten *for it, yet ſurely holding his Hand, and reſtraining him from ſuch turbulent Attempts, is not perſecuting him, but protecting thoſe to whom Protection is due.*

ERRATA.

PAge 114. l. 5. for *ſuppoſed*, read *ſupported*. p. 146. l. 1. for *ſuc*, r. *ſuch*. p. 64. l. 6. after *Improvements*, add *of*.

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SERMON

SERMON I.

HEB. I. 1, 2.

GOD, who at ſundry times, and in divers manners, ſpake in time paſt unto the Fathers by the Prophets,

Hath, in theſe laſt Days, ſpoken unto us by his Son.

AS a proper Introduction to diſpoſe Men to receive the Goſpel he preach'd, the Apoſtle obſerves, that God had in all Ages communicated his Will to Mankind by ſpecial Revelations. This from the Beginning was God's Method of publiſhing his Laws: And even in the

Heathen World we may trace out many traditionary Remains of thoſe Inſtitutions, which He deliver'd to the Patriarchs of Mankind. But the Family to whom this Epiſtle is eſpecially addreſs'd, which Providence had choſen, for the Appearance of that Perſon by whom the laſt Declaration of his Will ſhou'd be made, He was careful to keep in a conſtant Dependence on his Authority, by a continued Series of Revelations.

In the Fulneſs of Time the Son of his Love, that *Sun of Righteouſneſs* which had been promis'd, appear'd; *Light to lighten the* Gentiles, *and the Glory of his People* Iſrael *. That the Pride and Prejudices of a World, overrun with Darkneſs and Superſtition ſhou'd at firſt ſcruple his Authority That a Doctrine new and untried, oppoſite to the eſtabliſh'd Errors and Vices of Mankind, ſhou'd prevail but ſlowly, and meet with Difficulties and Contradiction, is no more than might expected. But when the Goſpel

* Luke ii. 32.

been long receiv'd, the Excellency of its Rules approved by publick Wiſdom and civil Eſtabliſhments, in all the more polite Nations of the World, and rejected only where Ignorance and Barbariſm prevail, we might reaſonably hope, that ſo much Experience and Authority ſhou'd ſecure it from any farther Inſults; that every Tongue ſhou'd be ſilenced, and every Hand reſtrain'd, from oppoſing a Religion ſo wiſe in its Directions, ſo powerful in its Influences, ſo manifeſtly conducive to the Happineſs of Mankind. But, in Defiance of our Laws, and in Affront to general Profeſſion, this harmleſs and moſt beneficial Inſtitution has found Enemies among us, who with open Zeal and Aſſiduity labour its Diſcredit and Subverſion. And what wou'd they ſubſtitute in the Room of it? Can they expect we ſhou'd give up a Religion, whoſe happy Influences have long engaged our Reverence and Eſteem, for we know not what? Nothing is offer'd: but the Chriſtian, and all other Revelations are repreſented as equally fables and Impoſtures. A God they are

contented to acknowlege; but perſuade us He has left Mankind every one to his own Government, without any other Guide or Rule than the Collections of natural Reaſon; and this is all the Proviſion that is made, for our Direction to Duty and Happineſs.

In Oppoſition to this Libertine Scheme, I ſhall endeavour to prove the Neceſſity of admitting ſome divine Revelation. The Apoſtle, in the Scripture before us, aſſerts the Fact, that there has been ſuch an One derived down thro' all Ages, and at laſt ſealed up, and perfected in the Goſpel of Jesus Christ. And if we can evince the Neceſſity of admitting ſome divine Revelation, his general Aſſertion will ſtand clear of all Difficulty; and the Chriſtian Revelation in particular, which he offers to us, may hope for an attentive and impartial Conſideration. I ſhall attempt this,

Iſt. By ſhewing, that nothing but the Credit and Authority of divine Revelation cou'd eſtabliſh an uniform Rule of Moral Virtue among Mankind.

That

THAT there is a God I am at Liberty to ſuppoſe, as an acknowledg'd Principle: And the Attributes of Wiſdom, Juſtice, Goodneſs, and Providence imply'd in that Idea, oblige us to conclude, that He is concern'd for the Happineſs of his Creatures, and has made a ſuitable Proviſion for it. And 'tis a Corollary ariſing hence, that the Happineſs and Perfection of every Creature, muſt conſiſt in acting according to the Will and Intention of the Creator. His Will is the proper Law of every Nature throughout his Dominion; and, to a free and intelligent Agent, this Will muſt be publiſh'd, be open to his Notice, lye before him as his Rule, and be recommended by ſuitable Motives to his Obſervance.

NOW 'tis evident, that both the publick and private Happineſs of Mankind depend on their Conduct towards one another; in other Words, on a mutual Practice of moral Virtue. We muſt, therefore, conclude, that 'tis the Will of God, that theſe Virtues ſhou'd obtain

in general Obſervance; and conſequently they muſt be propoſed to the general Notice of Men, and be inforced by Motives ſufficient to induce their Practice. That a divine Revelation is both the fulleſt and moſt compendious Proviſion to direct Men to the Knowledge of their Rule, and the moſt effectual to engage and unite them in the Obſervance of it, is apparent. Such, we bleſs God, we enjoy in the Goſpel; and therefore are very unwilling to part with it. But 'tis pretended, that God never made any ſuch Revelation; but left all Mankind to collect the Rule and Motives of their Actions, from the ſole Uſe of thoſe Faculties He gave them, without any prior Direction. Let us ſee, then, what a Rule of Morality is like to obtain upon this Hypotheſis.

Now, I preſume, the Gentlemen of this Scheme will admit human Reaſon to have been always the ſame it is now; ſubject to thoſe Weakneſſes and Imperfections we feel in ourſelves, and obſerve in others: For that it was ever

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in a State of greater Perfection, we learn only from Revelation. And, under this Conceſſion, we think it may be prov'd, that natural Reaſon cou'd not be ſuch a Direction to moral Virtue; and, conſequently, ſuch a Proviſion for the Happineſs of Mankind, as the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God oblige us to believe, He deſign'd us.

For, admitting that ſome thoughtful Perſons, of great Attention and Improvements, might collect as exact and uſeful a Syſtem of moral Duties as can be imagin'd; yet unleſs we can find an Expedient, to give their Concluſions the Authority of a general Rule, we have provided only for the Direction of theſe few; while the reſt of the World, who have neither Leiſure nor Abilities for theſe Reſearches, are left to wander in the dark, without any Guide or Meaſure of Duty. And when we conſider the Weakneſs and Confuſion of vulgar Capacities, how unequal they are to abſtract Inquiries, how irreſiſtably the various Luſts and Paſſions of Men will inter-

poſe, darken the little Light they have, and corrupt their Judgment, and perſuade each to accommodate his Rule to their Suggeſtions, what can we expect in the Reſult of this Scheme, but an utter Confuſion of all Morality? And ſince the Felicity of Men in this Life depends, not only on each Perſon's own Conduct, but on that of other Men too, even the few wiſe themſelves wou'd find their Happineſs but ill ſecured upon this Hypotheſis, and the general Event muſt be all the Miſery, that Folly and Paſſion, let looſe upon the World, wou'd naturally produce.

If, indeed, the weak, the ignorant, and the paſſionate wou'd ſubmit to the wiſe and thoughtful, we might hope for ſome Remedy to theſe Confuſions: But what Proviſion is made for this? The State of Nature, contended for, ſuppoſes all Men equal and independent. None has any Right to over-rule the Sentiments and Perſuaſions of another; but every Man is to think for himſelf, form his own Rule of Action, and judge of his own

own Intereſts. If it be ſaid, that the Equity and Uſefulneſs of Virtue, and the Inconveniences of Vice, muſt appear to the meaneſt Underſtanding, when propoſed to his Conſideration; and, therefore, tho' inferior Capacities might be unable to collect, and digeſt ſuch Preſcriptions into an uniform Rule of Practice, yet they wou'd preſently receive them, when offer'd by Perſons of greater Sagacity. We may anſwer to this, That Men are not ſo ready to ſubmit their own Underſtanding to other Mens, as this Expedient ſuppoſes. The weakeſt are often more opinionated of their Parts, and more tenacious of their Concluſions, than the beſt Capacities. We have known the greateſt Abſurdities in Morality aſſerted, even the Diſtinctions of Good and Evil reverſed, and *Private Vices defended as Publick Benefits*, by Perſons, who have, at the ſame Time, thought themſelves diſtinguiſh'd from the reſt of the World, by the Accuracy of their Reaſoning, and the Depth of their Penetration.

If Men had no Paſſions, or no Satiſfaction in gratifying them, the Reaſon of the Wiſe might hope for ſome Attention and Authority. But the Fact is quite otherwiſe; Men are led by ſtrong Appetites to vicious Pleaſures and Intereſts, which obſcure the Evidence, and overrule the Convictions of Truth. Even the Wiſe themſelves are not ſecure from their Deluſion, and how much more muſt they prevail among the Weak and Thoughtleſs? And if even the Arguments and Authority of Religion, are found often too weak to reſtrain the Torrent of Mens Paſſions, how irreſiſtably wou'd they bear down the mere Perſuaſions of Philoſophy? Let us imagine a Philoſopher addreſſing a Libertine in this ſuppoſed State of Nature, perſuading him to leave his Vices, and confine himſelf within the Rules he wou'd preſcribe to him. Might he not anſwer his Adviſer, ---- I am no more under your Direction, than you are under mine? In ſome things, as a Man of more Inquiry, I may permit you to ſee for me; but you muſt not pretend to feel for me too. I feel my ſelf happy in the way of Life I

have choſen, and muſt be render'd very uneaſy by the Reſtraints you adviſe. Do you purſue your own Satisfaction by what Methods you pleaſe, and leave me to the ſame Liberty in conſulting mine. I ſee not what effectual Reply he cou'd make to him upon the Hypotheſis contended for, or by what Argument of Duty or Intereſt he cou'd hope to prevail on his Compliance.

I do not ſay, that Juſtice, Temperance, and other moral Virtues may not be proved to ſober and diſpaſſionate Reaſon, the proper Intereſt and Duty of Man: They certainly are ſo; and when view'd with a clear and impartial Eye, and in a proper Light, muſt appear to be ſo. But this I ſay, that 'tis vain to expect that the generality of Men will ever be govern'd by ſober and diſpaſſionate Reaſon; and therefore a Scheme, whoſe Succeſs depends upon ſo groundleſs a Suppoſition, muſt be given up as chimerical. If every Man were left, as is here ſuppoſed, to collect his own Rule of Action, without the Awe or Direction of any Authority, Luſt wou'd be one

one Man's Reaſon, Avarice another's; every one's governing Paſſion wou'd be his Reaſon. Theſe are the Reaſons to whoſe Conduct Mankind muſt be left, when we take away the Light and Authority of Revelation. And, if we wou'd argue juſtly upon the State of the Caſe before us, we muſt conſider, what ſort of Morality ſuch Reaſons as theſe wou'd produce.

Mr. *Hobbs*, who thought ſomewhat deeper than theſe Gentlemen, perceived this great Difficulty in the Infidel Scheme. He ſaw plainly, that 'twas neceſſary to ſocial Happineſs, that Men ſhou'd be under ſome common Rule, ſome general Obligation to the Practice of thoſe Virtues which promote it. And that ignorant, wilful, and paſſionate Men, (of which Characters the bulk of Mankind will always be compoſed) left every one to his own Concluſions, would never be led by their own Reaſon, or be perſuaded by other Mens to agree in ſuch a common Rule. That ſuch a Rule cou'd never be eſtabliſh'd, but by a general Submiſſion to ſome

ſome Authority preſcribing it; and therefore, tho' he was as little a friend to Revelation as theſe Gentlemen, yet convinc'd of the Neceſſity of ſome Equivalent for its Authority, he ſubſtituted Civil Power in the Place of it, and made the Preſcriptions of the Magiſtrate his Standard of Morality. This Expedient will come under Conſideration; but at preſent I only obſerve, that from the reaſon of the Thing, confirm'd by the Conceſſions of this great Father of modern Infidelity, it appears, that no Syſtem of Morality cou'd ever obtain as a general Rule, but by the Preſcription of ſuch an Authority, as all Men wou'd be diſpos'd to ſubmit to. Such an Authority Divine Revelation unqueſtionably carries with it, the Authority of God, whom every Man, as a Creature, muſt confeſs himſelf bound to obey; whoſe Laws muſt be conſider'd as the Directions of infinite Wiſdom, Juſtice, and Goodneſs; and whoſe Threats and Promiſes as the immutable Declarations of Omnipotence and Truth. Every Motive, that can diſpoſe Man to Submiſſion, is here apply'd in its utmoſt Force and Efficacy: Gratitude calls upon him,

him, to reflect on his numberleſs Obligations to the Goodneſs of the Preſcriber. Prudence will engage his Acquieſcence in a Wiſdom, which ſees the Tendency of every Action, and knows his Intereſt better than he himſelf can do. Fear will remind him of his Juſtice and Power, and his Hopes will be animated with this firm Aſſurance, That, *faithfull is he who has promiſed, who will alſo perform* *.

Consider human Reaſon then, as it is in Fact, modify'd by the various Diſabilities, Paſſions, and Prejudices, which will ever prevail among the greater part of Mankind; conſider every Man left in this wild diſconcerted State without Rule or Guide, to ſearch out Truth and Happineſs by his own Collections; and what Diſtractions and Perplexities muſt they run into? What diſſonant, interfering Schemes of Morality muſt be produced? How irreconcileable to each other, and how inconſiſtent with publick, and conſequently with private Happineſs? And

* Heb. x. 23.

when

when you have this View before you, try if you can imagine any thing ſo deſireable, ſo appoſite to the wants of human Nature, as that God ſhou'd interpoſe; by an authoritative Declaration of his Will enlighten the Darkneſs, and compoſe the Diſſentions of Men; and unite them under a Rule of Action, which the Character of the Author muſt recommend to univerſal Reverence and Submiſſion. For what Man cou'd preſume himſelf wiſer than God, or dare to oppoſe the Perſuaſions of his Appetite, or the Imaginations of his Pride, to the Concluſions of infallible Wiſdom? Who cou'd diſtruſt his Goodneſs or Veracity, or venture to defy his Power? Even he who tranſgreſs'd ſuch a Direction, muſt confeſs his own Folly; and ſtill acknowledge the Law to be *holy, juſt, and good* *.

In ſhort, if the Social Happineſs of Mankind depends on a general Practice of moral Virtue; if this can never obtain but by a general Acknowledgment of ſome

* Rom. vii. 12.

com-

common Rule; if no Rule cou'd ever prevail for ſuch a general Acknowledgment, but by the Preſcription of ſome Authority to which all wou'd ſubmit; and if the Authority of God only cou'd effectually engage ſuch Submiſſion, his Goodneſs will oblige us to conclude, that he wou'd notify his Will, and not ſuffer his Creatures to want ſo neceſſary a Proviſion for their Happineſs.

But Mr. *Hobbs* thinks, he has given us an Equivalent for Revelation, in the Authority of the Civil Magiſtrate; whoſe Will he propoſes as the Meaſure of Good and Evil. But there occurrs at firſt View a fundamental Difficulty in this Scheme: How ſhall this Authority, which is to fix the Rules of Morality in the World, be eſtabliſh'd it ſelf? In that imaginary State of Nature, on which this Hypotheſis as well as the former is built, every Man is ſuppoſed equal and independent. How then are they to be brought into Order and Subjection? Why, they are all to be ſet to War with one another, and fight on, till they can harraſs themſelves into Sub-

Subordination: And when the Stronger have ſubdued the Weaker, the arbitrary Impoſitions of their Will are to be receiv'd as the ultimate Rule of Action. This it ſeems is the Original of Government; and the Dictates of a Power thus founded in Violence, Fraud, and Oppreſſion, are to be reverenced as the Standard of Right and Wrong, Vice and Virtue; and this Standard too muſt alter, as often as the Prince changes his Sentiments or Humour, and can laſt no longer, than till a ſuperior Force ſupplants him, or his Subjects themſelves ſhall have Courage and Strength enough to break his Yoke; which they have the ſame Right to ſhake off as he had to put on: And whenever they have Power, are under no Reſtraints of Conſcience, Duty, or Intereſt from attempting it.

But ſuppoſe this Government ſettled in a quiet Submiſſion, and its Adminiſtrations as regular as can be expected in the ordinary Courſe of things: No doubt it will be attended with great Advantages, be infinitely preferable to

that wild State of Anarchy before ſuppoſed; and, for its own Preſervation, will eſtabliſh many uſeful Rules of ſocial Life. But when its Commands are propoſed as the final Meaſure of moral Virtue, and the only Obligation to the Practice of it, it will be found but a poor Equivalent for a Divine Revelation. And the Diſparity will appear, if we conſider either its Direction, or its Influence. The Direction of human Laws cannot poſſibly be ſo particular, as to deſcend to all Actions of a moral Nature. There are numberleſs Acts of Juſtice, Charity, and other Virtues of great Importance to the mutual Happineſs of Men in Society, whoſe Obligation depends on variable Circumſtances, which the wiſeſt Conſtitution cannot aſcertain, and which therefore muſt be left to private Conſcience: And conſequently, no Authority can engage the Acknowledgment and Practice of theſe Duties, but ſuch as can reach the Conſcience under general Preſcriptions. Now a Divine Command, tho' deliver'd in the moſt general Terms, yet being addreſs'd to every Man's

Man's Conſcience, will extend its Influence and Application to every Occaſion of Action. But human Laws are confined in their Subject to ſpecifick Actions, and imply no more than they expreſs. If therefore human Laws are the ultimate Rule and Standard of moral Good and Evil; if nothing be good but what they direct, and nothing Evil but what they forbid, Men are left in theſe Caſes without any Rule, without any Motive or Obligation to theſe Duties, or any Reſtraint from acting contrary to them.

And when we come within the compaſs of Civil Authority, and the Caſes to which its Preſcriptions can reach, and conſider the Force and Efficacy of them, they will, in this reſpect, bear no Compariſon with a Divine Command. For,

1ſt. To a Divine Command the Character of the Author prepares Men to ſubmit, with a full Aſſurance of its Wiſdom and Juſtice: But Princes, they know, are not exempt from Weakneſs and Paſ-

ſions, which will unavoidably mix with their Counſels, and corrupt their Judgment, as they do other Mens. And tho' human Authority may reſtrain the Liberty of Action, yet it cannot take away the Liberty of Judgment; and after all Mr. *Hobbs* can ſay, where there is ſo little Security of the Abilities or Equity of the Preſcriber, Men will examine the Tendency of the Preſcription, and comply but heavily where they can perceive no other Goodneſs in it, but what the mere Pleaſure of ſuch an Authority can give it. That Confidence in the Wiſdom and Rectitude of the Law will be wanting, which alone can engage a chearful and hearty Obedience; and nothing will remain to influence Practice, but an Expectation of the Impoſer's Favour, or an Apprehenſion of his Reſentment.

As to the Favour of the Prince, ſuppoſing it always conducted by the exacteſt Wiſdom and Juſtice, and never to be guided by Humour or Paſſion; yet this is a Motive of a very narrow Influence. Few can fall under his Notice much

much fewer can hope for any diſtinguiſh'd Encouragement: And the moſt punctual Obedience of the far greater Number can expect no other Reward, than barely an Exemption from Puniſhment. And as to the Fear of his Reſentment, this Reſtraint has no longer any Force, where Men can preſume themſelves cunning enough to elude the Notice of human Juſtice, or rich enough to bribe, or ſtrong enough to defy the Execution of it. Human Authority is here at the end of its Line; its Proviſions can go no farther: And if there be no ſuperior Law, no higher Tribunal to whoſe Cogniſance and Juſtice Men are accountable, the crafty and the powerful, who can do moſt Miſchief, and moſt want Reſtraint, are left under none at all. So imperfectly are the moral Ends of Government, and the Rights and Intereſt both of Prince and People ſecured by human Authority, when 'tis left without the Support of Divine; which alone can ſupply the manifold Defects of Civil Power, and give Efficacy to the Inſtitution. When the Prince is ſuppoſed to

act himſelf under a ſuperior Rule, dictated by infinite Wiſdom and Juſtice, and an Almighty, Omnipreſent Power, whom no Artifice can deceive, and no Strength reſiſt, is acknowledg'd to inforce his Commands, this will derive Reverence on his Laws, and Authority on his Office. And agreeably all Law-givers and Founders of Societies have endeavour'd to give the Character they aſſumed, and the Rules of Life they preſcribed, the Support of Divine Authority. Either ſome Oracle was conſulted, and pronounced in general the ſuperior Wiſdom of the Man, or approved his Preſcriptions; or they were affirm'd to be dictated by ſome Dæmon. Some Evidence or other was call'd in, to atteſt a Divine Direction or Approbation; and whether this was real or only pretended, the Application equally proves, that no Principle was preſumed ſufficient to engage the Reverence and Submiſſion of Men to any Syſtem of Rules, but a Perſuaſion that they came from Heaven, or were ratify'd by Divine Authority.

UPON the whole; we have conſider'd the Expedients which have undertaken to ſupply Mankind with a Rule of Morality, equal to the Purpoſes of ſocial Life, without having Recourſe to divine Revelation. It is evident, that no Rule cou'd anſwer this End, unleſs it cou'd obtain a general Acknowledgment: And I think it as evident, that Mankind, left every one to his own Collections, in a State of abſolute Independency, cou'd never agree in ſuch a Rule, or be kept even a Day in an uniform Submiſſion to it. Before this can appear poſſible, the Bulk of Mankind muſt be ſuppoſed to apprehend clearly, and reaſon juſtly, without Prejudice, Paſſion, or Partiality; a Suppoſition manifeſtly contrary to Fact, and fit only for *Utopia*.

AND as to Mr. *Hobbs*'s Expedient, we confeſs the Excellency and Uſefulneſs of Civil Government; but we think the libertine Principles, from which he derives it, leave it precarious in its Foundation, and even diſqualify it for promoting ei-

ther the Virtue or Happineſs of Mankind. And when we conſider Civil Power, with all the Advantages and Perfection that any Suppoſition can give it, yet ſtill it wants a prior Rule for its own Direction, and requires the Acknowledgment of a ſuperior Power, to procure Firmneſs to its Eſtabliſhment, and Reverence and Efficacy to its Commands.

In ſhort; under the former Hypotheſis, Mankind are left open to all the Diſtraction that Luſt and Folly, all the wild Appetites of corrupt Nature let looſe without Reſtraint, muſt neceſſarily produce. The latter only changes the Source of our Miſery; and, to reſcue us from the Paſſions of a confuſed Multitude, delivers us up, in the moſt implicit Bondage, to the arbitrary Will of one Tyrant, undirected by any Rule, unawed by any Authority, and diſtinguiſh'd from the reſt of the Herd by nothing elſe but a ſucceſsful Oppreſſion. Cou'd we conceive the World without a God, ſomething like this might be ſuppoſed

poſed the Condition of Man in it; but Reaſon can never admit ſuch an Image as this, of a World made and govern'd by infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs: * *A God of Order, and not of Confuſion.* And yet, for theſe Abſurdities we are perſuaded to exchange our holy Faith. Theſe are the Schemes which pretend to aſſert the Liberties of Mankind, and reſcue them from the Yoke and Terrors of Superſtition. This is the bleſſed State into which we are invited, and which is immediately to commence, as ſoon as we can be prevail'd on to depart from Revelation. But ſurely, if this be the beſt Proſpect that human Reaſon can give us, after ſo much Study and Refinement, without calling in a ſuperior Aſſiſtance, we need no other Argument for the Neceſſity of ſuch Aſſiſtance.

WHAT a different Face of Things appears to us under the Hypotheſis of Revelation? How effectually is every Diſ-

* 2 Cor. 14. 33.

order

order calm'd, Ignorance and Folly enlighten'd, and every Paſſion brought into Subjection, by the Authority of infinite Wiſdom, Juſtice, and Power? What Reverence and Efficacy attend Civil Government, when 'tis conſider'd as the *Ordinance of God* *, directed by the Preſcriptions of his Wiſdom, and ſupported by his Authority? So far as the Conduct of a voluntary Agent can be influenced by the moſt venerable Direction, and the moſt powerful Motives of Action, we have here the utmoſt Proviſion that can be made, or even conceived, for the Order, Virtue, and Happineſs of Mankind.

LET us, therefore, bleſs God, who has call'd us to the Knowledge of his Will by a pure and holy Revelation, derived down to us thro' a long Succeſſion of Ages, and at laſt compleated, in its full Light and Perfection, by the Goſpel of *Jeſus Chriſt*. A Rule worthy the Wiſdom of the Author, fitted for the Direction of every Relation, Office, or

* Rom. 13. 2.

Con-

Condition of Life, and equally conducive to the Happineſs of all. The Prince is here taught how to govern, and the Subject how to obey. The Rich and the Powerful are preſcribed thoſe Virtues, which will procure them Honour and Eſteem; and the Poor ſuch Returns of Gratitude, as will ſecure to them Favour, Support, and Protection. The Inſolence of the one, and the Envy of the other, every provoking and diſquieting Paſſion are put under Diſcipline and Reſtraint: And the various Ranks and Orders of Men are enjoin'd ſuch a mutual Exchange of Services, as will endear them to each other, and ſpread Chearfulneſs and Pleaſure thro' human Society. And to the whole Syſtem of theſe beneficial Duties we are engaged, by all the Motives that can be offer'd to the Reaſon, or influence the Hopes or Fears of an intelligent Nature. * *Happy are the People that are in ſuch a Caſe, yea, bleſſed are the People who have the*

* Pſalm 144. 15.

Lord

Lord for their God! Let vain and inſolent Sinners reproach us, if they pleaſe, with Slavery and Superſtition; but let us glory in Subjection to the Will of God, whoſe Service is perfect Freedom, whoſe Fear is Peace and Liberty.

SERMON

SERMON II.

HEB. I. 1, 2.

GOD, *who at ſundry times, and in divers manners, ſpake in time paſt unto the Fathers by the Prophets,*

Hath, in theſe laſt Days, ſpoken unto us by his Son.

WE have conſider'd the Neceſſity of divine Authority, to fix ſuch a Rule of Moral Virtue, and unite Men in ſuch a Submiſſion to it, as the private and ſocial Happineſs of Mankind requires. It ap-

appears, how imperfectly theſe Ends cou'd be provided for, either by the Reaſon of an independent Multitude, left every one to his own Collections, or by the Preſcriptions of Civil Authority, if we exclude divine Revelation. And it cannot but confirm our Adherence to our holy Faith, and that excellent Rule of Life and Action it propoſes to us, to obſerve for what a Scene of Miſery and Confuſion we are perſuaded to exchange it. But before the Gentlemen, who are ſo importunate with us to part with Chriſtianity, can expect our Compliance, they are concern'd alſo to anſwer us another Queſtion, — What Religion are we to have in the Place of it?

For if, as they permit us to believe, there is a God, the Creator and Governour of the World, concern'd for the Happineſs of his Creatures, every intelligent Nature in the Creation, muſt be under a Senſe of Duty and Gratitude to this Being. He muſt reflect, how much he depends on his Providence, how much he owes to his Good-

neſs

neſs, and be convinced, that all the Homage and Subjection he is able to expreſs, is due to his infinite Majeſty. He will perceive his Happineſs to depend on the Favour or Diſpleaſure of this Almighty Power; who rules over all, and diſpoſes every Event of Life. Theſe are Sentiments, which no Degrees of Barbariſm have been able wholly to efface out of the Minds of Men; and which have led all Ages and Nations of the World into ſome kind of Worſhip of the Deity, ſome Applications to incline his Favour, and avert or reconcile his Anger: So that we may look upon Religion as a Natural and Univerſal Principle, as diſtinctive of our Species as Reaſon it ſelf.

And when we conſider Men as ſocial Creatures, united in Communities, and having a joynt intereſt to engage the Publick Bleſſings and Protection of God to them; no Concluſion can appear more obvious and natural, than that publick and joynt Applications to the Deity, are as proper to acknowledge,

or

or procure theſe publick Bleſſings, as the Addreſſes of each Individual are with reſpect to his perſonal Wants. To which we may add, that the Fear of God being, in its Nature, the only Principle that can effectually reſtrain Men from Frauds and Injuries, and engage them to Juſtice and Veracity in their Dealings, 'tis reaſonable in it ſelf, and neceſſary to that mutual Truſt and Confidence which the Ends of Society require, that Men ſhou'd give one another ſome Security that they act under the Influence of this Principle. And what Security can they give, but appearing publickly to worſhip God? He who does this, declares that he owns and fears a God: But he who worſhips none, may juſtly be preſumed to acknowledge none; and conſequently, not to be reſtrain'd from any Wickedneſs by the Awe of a Supreme Being.

WHILE we own a God then, we cannot be ſatisfy'd without ſome Religion; and the Ends of Society require ſome publick Worſhip of the Deity; and what Religion

Religion have theſe Gentlemen provided for us inſtead of the Chriſtian? I ſuppoſe they will tell us Natural Religion. But what Acts of Worſhip ſhall this Religion conſiſt of? By what Obſervances ſhall we propitiate the Deity, reconcile his Anger, and engage his Favour and Aſſiſtance to us? As to ſocial Worſhip, this, in the Nature of it, requires an Agreement in ſome publick outward Obſervances; for 'tis not imaginable, how Men can any other Way be united in a common Action. What Proviſion then is made for this Agreement? Who ſhall appoint the Rule? And by what Arguments, or Authority, ſhall the various Sentiments and Capacities of Men be reconciled in a Submiſſion to it? Every Man, upon the Principles here ſuppoſed, is left to collect a Religion from his own Reaſon independently on any other Man's. And what Harmony can we expect in the Reſult of this Scheme? In theſe general Concluſions, that there is a God, and that he is to be worſhipp'd, every Man's Reaſon may be ſuppoſed to

concurr; but before Men can be united in ſocial Worſhip, they muſt agree in the Acts and Obſervances it muſt conſiſt of; and here the Diſtraction will begin. For Reaſon in general directing nothing of this kind, with any Certainty of the Divine Approbation, the Concluſions of the beſt Underſtanding will be but his Opinion; and every ones Opinion will be of equal Authority; the Conſequence of which muſt be as many Plans of Religion as there are Men. If (as has been before obſerv'd) the Concluſions of the Wiſe cou'd never hope to over-rule the Folly and Obſtinacy of an equal independent Multitude, and obtain the Authority of a general Rule even in moral Concluſions, which are in their Nature within the Compaſs and Proof of human Reaſon; much leſs cou'd they prevail for this Authority, in a Queſtion where they cou'd offer nothing but mere Gueſs and Opinion. If in ſuch a State of Independency, nothing but the Authority of a Divine Revelation cou'd engage a general Acquieſcence of Men in any Syſtem of moral Duties, a Subject

in which 'tis poſſible for Natural Reaſon, with ſuch Improvements and Attention as 'tis capable of, to diſcover the Will of God; much more muſt ſuch a Revelation be neceſſary, to give Aſſurance and Reception to a Scheme of Divine Worſhip; a Subject in which Reaſon confeſſes its Ignorance, and cannot with any Certainty affirm what is acceptable to God.

Mr. *Hobbs*'s Recourſe, for the Solution of this Difficulty too, is to civil Authority, whoſe Preſcriptions he makes the ultimate Rule of Religion, as well as Morality. What he has offer'd ſhall not be neglected: But at preſent I obſerve, that the Modern Enemies to Revelation, whom I am here oppoſing, can have no Advantage from his Scheme; becauſe their Hypotheſis equally excludes God and the Magiſtrate: And 'tis laid down as a firſt Principle among them, that no human Authority has any thing to do in Matters of Religion. We are required by them to conſider Mankind in a State of abſolute Independency as to this Point;

and I think it as evident, as the Negative in any moral Queſtion can be, that, under the Suppoſitions of that State, no Religion, at leaſt no ſocial Religion, cou'd ever obtain, but by the Credit and Authority of Divine Revelation. And if we conſider the Caſe of each Individual in this State, excluſive of any joynt or ſocial Worſhip; What monſtrous Abſurdities muſt the Folly, Ignorance, and Superſtition, which will ever prevail among the greater Part of Mankind, lead them into, when left to their own Collections, without Rule or Inſtructor?

When we are inquiring what human Reaſon wou'd do, it may be worth the while to look back, and obſerve in Fact and Experience what it has done. I preſume, the Gentlemen I am oppoſing will admit the World to be, at leaſt, as old as we believe it: And is it not very ſtrange, that the Religion which they ſuppoſe natural Reaſon to dictate, ſhou'd never obtain as a publick Worſhip of the Deity, in any one Nation, or Society

ciety of Men thro' the whole World? Cou'd no Body, beſides theſe ſagacious Perſons, ever light on this obvious Diſcovery? Or were Mankind ſo univerſally abſurd and irrational, that none cou'd ever gather a Congregation, to joyn with him in a Worſhip, which every Man's Reaſon is ſuppoſed to direct? From this ſingle Conſideration we may juſtly conclude, that this Natural Religion to which we are invited, is but a dark impracticable Project, incapable of that rational Evidence and Satisfaction it pretends to give. And if, on the other Hand, it appears upon Inquiry, that Mankind have always referr'd themſelves to Revelation, as the only Rule that cou'd direct, the only Authority that cou'd preſcribe, an acceptable Worſhip of God; this is a fair Proof, that human Reaſon is conſcious of its own Weakneſs and Inſufficiency for this Inquiry, and can reſt on nothing but Revelation. How was it then, that all the Superſtitions and Schemes of Religion, which we have either known or heard of, obtain'd Credit and Reception

in the World? Did they not all pretend to derive from Heaven, and refer to ſome Revelation, ſome ſpecial Notice of a Divine Direction or Approbation, for their Original? We, who acknowledge the Scriptures of the Old and New Teſtament as ſuch a Revelation, contend that God did ſpecially appoint the manner of his Worſhip to the Patriarchs of Mankind. And we wou'd ask a Deiſt, what other rational Account he can give of the Way of Worſhip by Sacrifice, ſo early and ſo generally receiv'd thro' the World. What Suggeſtions of Reaſon cou'd lead ſo many diſtant Nations, without Affinity or Correſpondence with each other, to agree in ſo improbable a Concluſion, as that the Favour of God ſhould be inclined, his Anger appeaſed, and their Offences attoned, by ſhedding the Blood of his Creatures: An Action, in all the Views of Reaſon, rather like to provoke, than reconcile the Deity. What tolerable Account can be given of this notorious Fact, but that aſſign'd by us, — that this was originally a poſitive Injunction of God, derived down

down by Tradition to the ſeveral Families of Mankind, and carried with them into the ſeveral Places of their Diſperſion? And I cannot but obſerve by the Way, what Confirmation the Chriſtian Religion receives, from the clear and conſiſtent Account it gives us of this Inſtitution. When we conſider Sacrifices in the Views ariſing to us from that Syſtem of Theology, as prefiguring the final Sacrifice of Chriſt, *that Lamb who was ſlain from the Foundation of the World,* * the Relation and Significancy of the Rite are apparent. Nothing cou'd be better deviſed, or more apt to continue down ſuch an Expectation among Mankind. We may reaſonably believe, that, when this Rite was appointed, the Intention of it was, in ſome Meaſure, explained; and the Faith of Men directed to the Hope it was deſign'd to preſerve. But 'tis eaſy to conceive how all this might be loſt, and yet the Rite it ſelf retained. A Doctrine, deliver'd in the Prophetick

* Rev. xiii. 8.

Obſcurity, and taught only by oral Tradition, might eaſily be loſt or miſtaken; but 'twas ſcarce poſſible, Men ſhou'd forget an outward viſible Act, performed by their Fathers as a Propitiation of the Deity. This was portable, and travel'd with them wherever they went: And all the ſucceeding Superſtitions they received, prevail'd only for a new Application of this Rite, with regard to the Object of Worſhip, or the Addition of ſome others to it. But I muſt obſerve further, that none of theſe acceſſional Superſtitions obtain'd in the World, but upon the Credit of a particular Revelation from Heaven. Some Signification or other of the Divine Will was preſumed, in Obedience to which they were admitted into Religion; and generally the ſame Hiſtories that report the Obſervances, tell us alſo the pretended Revelations which authorized them. This Argument, and this only, was able to engage the Faith and Submiſſion of Mankind. It was obvious enough to conclude, that God might annex his Favours to what Obſervances He pleas'd;

But

But Reaſon cou'd not diſcover his Pleaſure, or by any Concluſions of its own aſſure theſe Effects to one Scheme of Religion in preference to another. It might indeed have refuſed whatever appear'd inconſiſtent with the Attributes of the Divine Nature. Thus far it might argue in the Negative: but, as to any poſitive Direction, it ſtood ſilent and ſuſpended, liſtening after ſome Voice from Heaven; and was, in this Diſpoſition, prepared to admit any Superſtitions, which the Craft and Subtilty of the Devil or Man impoſed under that Character. The beſt Underſtanding was here in the Dark, and cou'd affirm nothing poſitively from its own Light: But as to the thoughtleſs Vulgar, who have neither Leiſure nor Capacity for accurate Examinations, they acted, as it muſt always be expected they will do, and reſign'd themſelves implicitly to the Appearance of Revelation.

As the univerſal Conduct of Mankind is an Argument, that human Nature cannot reſt ſatisfy'd in any Scheme of

of Religion, but what it preſumes has the Authority of a Divine Preſcription; ſo the many Abſurdities and Impieties, which were admitted under that Character into the Heathen Worſhip, are a good Proof how unable human Reaſon is to judge for its ſelf in this Inquiry; how neceſſary for Men, and how agreeable to the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God it is, that He ſhould direct them by a real Revelation.

If this Natural Religion we hear ſo much of, imply'd any determinate Worſhip; if human Reaſon had ſuch clear and poſitive Views in this Matter, as thoſe who recommend it for our ultimate Rule wou'd perſuade us to believe; it is not imaginable how thoſe ridiculous, and, which are worſe, thoſe impure and immoral Rites which polluted the Heathen Worſhip, cou'd have found ſo wide a Reception. 'Tis true, indeed, theſe were not propoſed as the Concluſions of Reaſon, but as the Preſcriptions of pretended Revelations; But they were the Contrivances of their Reaſon who

who impoſed theſe pretended Revelations. And as they were concern'd, upon political Accounts, to aſſure the Succeſs of the Impoſture, they wou'd certainly leave it as little expoſed to Objection as might be; and adapt it, as well as they cou'd, to the Taſte and Sentiments of thoſe to whom they offer'd it: And accordingly they did accommodate it to the Reaſon of thoſe to whom they propoſed it; a Reaſon darkned by Ignorance, and corrupted by Paſſion. To the Approbation of ſuch a Reaſon as this, the Pretenſe of a New Revelation found it ſelf even recommended, by offering an Indulgence to the Luſt, the Cruelty, or Revenge of Men. Hence it was, that the moſt abominable Pollutions of Senſuality, the Sacrificing captive Enemies, and other Impieties were received into the Pagan Rituals, as Acts of Religion, and Propitiations of the Deity. So unable is Man, without the ſpecial Direction of God, to fix the proper Rule of his Actions, either in Religion or Morality.

If it be ſaid, that the Offence which theſe Impieties muſt give to the Divine Nature, might have appear'd to any one who attended to the Conſideration of them, and therefore theſe Inſtances do not prove the Incapacity of Reaſon to judge of this Subject, but only an Abuſe or Inattention of it; We may Anſwer, that the Queſtion is not how human Reaſon might act in ſuch Circumſtances, but how it wou'd act. This is indeed the great Fallacy, that runs thro' almoſt all the Libertine Schemes, which of late have been offer'd us. In their Premiſſes they conſider human Reaſon in its higheſt Perfection, and then argue as if every Man in the World wou'd always act according to this Reaſon. No doubt right Reaſon might have diſcern'd the Inconſiſtency of ſuch Impurities with the Nature of Divine Worſhip; but Mankind, conſider'd in the groſs, never were, nor ever will be govern'd by right Reaſon. And we are not inquiring, what Reaſon in its utmoſt Improvement might do; this is human Reaſon only in Theory; in Fact it is quite

quite another thing; lazy in its Search, confuſed in its Apprehenſion, and weak in its Deductions. Its Perceptions are blinded, and even its Convictions overborn, by various Luſts and Paſſions. This will ever be the Reaſon of a Multitude; and the Inquiry before us is what ſuch a Reaſon as this, left to its ſelf without any Superior Rule or Direction, wou'd produce or admit: And from what it actually has done in theſe Circumſtances, we may fairly infer what it wou'd do again. Human Reaſon, as to its natural Powers, is juſt the ſame now, as it was two Thouſand Years ago. If it argues better in Religion; if it rejects thoſe abſurd and deteſtable Modes of Worſhip it then reverenced and applauded, 'tis not becauſe its Faculties are, in themſelves, any clearer or ſtronger than they were; but becauſe it has ſubmitted its Weakneſs and Ignorance, its Pride and Paſſions to the Light and Authority of the Chriſtian Revelation. Take away the Direction and Reſtraint of this Authority, it will act juſt as it did, and relapſe into the ſame Extravagancies, the ſame Folly and

and Superſtition that prevail'd on it before.

SUPPOSE, then, theſe Gentlemens Principles ſhou'd univerſally be received (as no doubt they intend they ſhou'd be, by publiſhing them to the World) and that in conſequence of them Chriſtianity ſhou'd be aboliſh'd. It concerns us to reflect, what Face of things wou'd ſucceed in the Place of it. That State of Natural Religion, as they affect to call it, a Worſhip of the Deity dictated by ſober and Diſpaſſionate Reaſon, which they perſuade us to expect, is a mere ſpeculative Notion, which never was, nor ever can be, reduced into publick Practice. Theſe Projecters will find it difficult to agree among themſelves what Acts of Worſhip this Natural Religion ſhou'd conſiſt of; but what can we imagine muſt be the general Event of this Scheme among Mankind, left every one to ſhift for himſelf, and deviſe his own Religion? Human Reaſon, indeed, under its common Diſabilities, is pretty uniform ſo far as theſe firſt and general Concluſions,

cluſions, — That there is a God, and that He is to be worſhip'd; but as ſoon as we go beyond them, and carry the Inquiry into the Particulars of that Worſhip, (as we muſt do before it can be adapted for the Concurrence of any Number of Men in it) the beſt Capacities can but gueſs their Way, and the Bulk of Mankind muſt preſently be loſt in Darkneſs and Confuſion. Imagine, then, the Suppoſitions of this Scheme effectually to take Place; Men to be univerſally perſuaded to renounce all Revelation, and Divine Worſhip to be left a Blank, to be fill'd up as every Man pleas'd; What wou'd be the Reſult? Why, it ſeems a glorious State of Natural Religion. But is there any Proviſion made for publick Worſhip? None at all, it muſt be given up as impracticable. So that this State of Natural Religion muſt, in all Appearance, be a State of general Irreligion. But Experience aſſures us that the far greater Part of Mankind will have a Religion, and will not be ſatisfy'd without ſome Appearance of Revelation in ſupport of it: And therefore the real Conſequence of diſcarding

diſcarding the Chriſtian Revelation, wou'd be a Succeſſion of ſome other Pretence in the room of it: A Revival of ſome old, and a diſtracted diſſonant Jargon of new Superſtitions. Theſe are the Bleſſings, to a Participation of which theſe Gentlemen ſo earneſtly call us. The neceſſary Conſequences, that muſt attend the giving up Chriſtianity upon their Scheme, are either that no Face or Appearance of Religion wou'd be left in the World; or elſe that all the abſurd and impious Superſtitions that Folly, Ignorance, Knavery or Enthuſiaſm cou'd ſuggeſt, wou'd prevail with ſo irreconcileable a Diſtraction, as muſt render all Religion ridiculous, and all ſocial Worſhip impoſſible.

Let us ſee, then, how Mr. *Hobbs* has provided for us upon his Hypotheſis, which referrs us to the Magiſtrate for the ultimate Rule of our Religion. Something better it muſt be confeſs'd: For, in the firſt Place, here is ſome, tho' imperfect, Proviſion made for the political Ends of Religion, and its Influence on human

human Society. And then, if the Magiſtrate happens to approve it, we have ſtill a Chance to keep the Chriſtian Religion. But we wou'd willingly receive our Religion upon a better Authority, and hold it by a better Tenure than this.

For, *1ſt.* The Reaſon of the Magiſtrate is no more able to diſcover the Will of God, or what Worſhip is agreeable to him, than the Reaſon of other Men; and therefore, as to any Preſumption of engaging his Favour, any Satisfaction of Conſcience in the Performance, we are in the ſame, or rather a worſe, Condition upon this Hypotheſis than the former.

2dly, It is notorious, that the moſt abſurd and impious Superſtitions, that have ever obtain'd in the World, have been authoriſed by Civil Power; and therefore, we are no better ſecured againſt the Return of them by truſting the Magiſtrate, without any prior Rule or Direction, to provide for us, than by

leaving every Man to provide for himſelf. And,

Laſtly, I muſt obſerve, that Civil Authority has not, in Fact, preſcribed any Religion as the Concluſions of its own Wiſdom, but as directed or confirm'd by ſome Revelation. The Founders and ſucceeding Lawgivers of Societies ſaw a political Neceſſity of authoriſing ſome Religion; but they ſaw alſo, that nothing cou'd give Men that Satisfaction they requir'd in Religion, nothing cou'd aſſure them that God approved and wou'd reward the Service, but the Declaration of God himſelf. And therefore, tho' they adjuſted the Religion they choſe or inſtituted, as well as they cou'd, to their political Schemes, and to the Tempers, Sentiments, and ſometimes to prevailing Vices of the People, to induce them more eaſily to credit a pretended Revelation; yet they rely'd not upon their own Authority, as ſufficient to recommend it to the Reverence and Conſcience of Men, but depended on the Revelation itſelf for that Effect. Ci-

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vil Authority then, which Mr. *Hobbs* offers us to ſupply the Place of Revelation, refuſes the Province aſſign'd to it, and refers itſelf to Revelation for its own Direction in Religion ; and pretends only to inforce the Commands of a ſuperior Authority. Upon the whole, this Hypotheſis, tho' it provides ſome Remedy againſt the Confuſions of the former, yet leaves us, upon the Iſſue, in little better Condition than that. We are to give up our Religion in a Chart blank ; and what are we to expect in the Place of it ? Even what a Man weak, ignorant, and undirected as ourſelves, ſhall pleaſe to appoint us. We are to worſhip God, without any Satisfaction of Conſcience in what we do, any Preſumption of his Approbation, any Proſpect of Reward from him. This is the manifeſt Conſequence of this Hypotheſis, as it ſtands in its own Terms, and propoſes the Will of civil Authority as the ultimate Rule of our Religion, excluſive of all Revelation. But if we conclude, as we juſtly may, what this Authority wou'd do, from what it

formerly has done, the real Event of diſmiſſing the Chriſtian Religion, as we are perſuaded to do, and deſiring this Authority to ſupply us with ſome other in the Room of it, muſt be, that either *Mahometiſm*, *Paganiſm*, ſome old or new Superſtition, as the Humour or Enthuſiaſm of the Prince happens to lead him, ſhou'd be authoriſed and impoſed on us as our Religion.

We have ſeen and examin'd the various Schemes of Infidelity, the Overtures upon whoſe Encouragement we are deſired to renounce our Religion. But ſurely if human Reaſon, for the Benefit of whoſe Direction we are perſuaded to withdraw ourſelves from Revelation, can make no better Offers than theſe, we may be permitted to ſtay where we are.

I propoſed not at preſent to aſſert the Evidence of the Chriſtian Revelation, but only to clear the Way to it, by obſerving the Neceſſity of admitting ſome Revelation; and we deſire

you only to adhere to the Chriſtian, till ſome other better proved, and better recommended, ſhall be offer'd in the Place of it. In the mean Time, what has occurr'd in theſe Reflections, will, I hope, determine you not to give up an Inſtitution, which directs ſo rational a Service of the Deity, and enforces, by the nobleſt Proſpects and Motives of Action, ſo pure, ſo uſeful a Syſtem of Morality, ſo conducive to the perſonal and civil Intereſts of Mankind, either for that wild, impracticable Project of Natural Religion, to which our modern Deiſts invite you, or for what Mr. *Hobbs*'s Magiſtrate ſhall be pleas'd to deviſe for you. Bring but an equal, impartial Mind to the Inquiry, and the more attentively you examine the Goſpel, the more you will perceive both the Evidence of its Authority, and the Excellency of its Rules: And be induced to adore the Goodneſs and Mercy of God, * *Whereby the Day-ſpring from on high hath*

* Luke 1. 78, 79.

viſited us, to give Light to them that ſate in Darkneſs and the Shadow of Death, and to guide our Feet in the Way of Peace.

SERMON

SERMON III.

1 PETER III. 15.

Be ready always to give an Answer, to every Man that asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you, with Meekness and Fear.

SEVERAL obvious Conclusions arise to us from these Words. As,

Ist. THAT we must expect to be ask'd a Reason of the Hope that is in us. And tho' it may be presum'd, that the Occasions of answering Questions of this kind occurr'd more frequently when

this Epiſtle was wrote, when the Profeſſion of Chriſtianity was yet but new, its Converts comparatively a ſmall Number, and the greater Part of thoſe among whom they lived were Infidels to its Authority; yet the Predictions of the firſt, and the Experience of all ſucceeding Ages aſſure us, that the Goſpel will never want Enemies, who will call us to this Duty.

III^ly. We may obſerve, that this Precept is not given with any ſpecial Reſtraint to the Miniſters and Teachers of Religion, but directed without Limitation to all Chriſtians. The Stewards, indeed, of the divine Myſteries, the Shepherds of the Flock, are by the Nature of their Office and Station eſpecially requir'd to reſiſt Gain-ſayers, and ought to be more eminently prepared for this Service. But, ſince thoſe who lye in wait to deceive, will generally attempt the Sheep rather than the Shepherd, 'tis the Duty and Concern of every Chriſtian to be ready for a Trial, to which he is ſo much expoſed. And there-

therefore, tho' we are forbidden to entertain you with ſuch Queſtions as only tend to *gender Strife* *, yet 'tis our bounden Duty, and a neceſſary Application of our Office, to inſtruct you in ſuch Queſtions as relate to the Fundamentals of our Faith, and enable you to give an Anſwer to all who ſhall oppoſe them. But eſpecially is this Care neceſſary, when open and publick Attempts are made upon the firſt Principles of our Religion. When the Contention is not about the Fitneſs of ſome Materials, or the Decency of ſome Ornaments in the Fabrick of the Church; (tho' theſe are not to be diſregarded as Trifles) but the Edifice itſelf, and even the Ground it ſtands on, are attack'd: the Miſſion of our Lord, and the whole Authority of the Goſpel diſputed. In an Article of ſo much Danger, every Hand ſhou'd be ſtrengthened, and provided with proper Arms for Defence. We may obſerve,

* 2 Tim. ii. 23.

III^ly.

IIIly. The juſt Temper with which theſe Conteſts ſhou'd be managed on our Part, *with Meekneſs and Fear; i. e.* without the Railings of Anger, or the Levity of the Buffoon. We are required to * *contend earneſtly for our Faith;* but the Firmneſs and Zeal implyd in this Expreſſion, may very well conſiſt with ſuch a reverent and ſerious Compoſure of Mind, as is agreeable to the Gravity and Importance of the Subject, and the Genius of our Religion. But,

Laſtly, The great Concluſion ſuggeſted by theſe Words, and to which I wou'd chiefly engage your Attention, is,

That juſt and ſatisfactory Reaſons may be given for the Hope and Faith we profeſs. Our Religion deſires no other Favour, than a ſober and diſpaſſionate Examination. It ſubmits its

* *The general Epiſtle of* Jude, 3 ver.

Grounds

Grounds and Reaſons to an unprejudiced Trial; and hopes to approve itſelf to the Conviction of any equitable Enquirer.

In ſome former Diſcourſes I have endeavour'd to open a Way to this Queſtion, by ſhewing in general the Neceſſity of ſome Revelation. I proceed now to conſider, in particular, what Evidences we have that the Chriſtian Religion is derived to us from ſuch a Revelation.

Now the Proofs of a divine Revelation may be diſtinguiſh'd into *Internal* and *External.* By *Internal* Proofs, I mean ſuch as ariſe to us from the Matter contain'd, the Doctrines taught, or the Rules preſcribed by the Syſtem propoſed as a divine Revelation. The *External* Proofs are ſuch outward Facts, as aſſert the Atteſtation of God to it. A Concurrence of both theſe kinds of Evidence is neceſſary, to aſſure our Faith in a divine Revelation. For if the Matter be ſuch, as Reaſon tells us 'tis impoſſible

poſſible God ſhou'd reveal, no outward Proofs will be able to convince us that God did reveal it. On the other Side, tho' the Matter be ſuch as might be reveal'd by God, yet external and poſitive Proofs only can aſſure us of the Fact, that God did reveal it. 'Tis my Intention at this Time, to conſider the *Internal* Proofs of the Goſpel Revelation; and ſhew, what Anſwer may be given on this Head, *to every one who aſks a Reaſon of the Hope that is in us.*

BUT it muſt be premiſed, that from theſe internal Proofs we do not pretend poſitively and directly to infer, that any Doctrine or Syſtem, the Scriptures of the New Teſtament for Inſtance, are a divine Revelation; but only that they may be. Some pious and good Men, indeed, from the excellent Effects, the Comforts and Illuminations they have found from reading the holy Scriptures, have concluded, that they carried in themſelves a poſitive Evidence of the Spirit of God. But, I doubt, this Argument is only perſonal to themſelves,

ſelves, and cannot, with any Hopes of Succeſs, be apply'd to the Conviction of an Unbeliever. For theſe Effects of the Scriptures, are owing to the good Diſpoſition with which they are read, and the Concurrence of divine Grace with it. He who is not ſo diſpoſed, will not find theſe Effects; and conſequently, will have no Inducement to make the ſame Inferences that they do. He cannot ſee them in the ſame Light, and diſcern the ſame Character in them. Whoever will argue from this Topick with another, does, in Reality, only appeal to himſelf, and his own Apprehenſions: And if a *Mahometan* ſhou'd tell him he feels the ſame Effects from the *Alcoran,* and ſees the ſame Marks of Divinity in it, he wou'd offer the ſame Proof for his Superſtition, as the other offers for the Goſpel. If we expect to convince any Man of what he does not yet allow, we muſt deduce it from ſome Principle which he either does, or we can by Reaſon oblige him to acknowledge. But to argue from inward Sentiments of our own, which he has not,

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and we cannot give him, is only perſuading him to believe becauſe we believe; and he may as well perſuade us to disbelieve, becauſe he disbelieves.

But tho' it cannot be inferr'd from the Contents of any Book or Syſtem of Doctrine that 'tis a Divine Revelation, yet it may be inferr'd that 'tis not. A Negative Concluſion may be good in this Caſe, tho' a Poſitive cannot. If ſuch Book or Syſtem contains any thing contrary to any prior acknowledg'd Truth, this is a good Proof that 'tis not a Divine Revelation; becauſe we are aſſured that God cannot affirm to us a manifeſt Falſhood: But if no ſuch Objection appears againſt it, all we can conclude is, that it may be reveal'd by God. Where a precedent Revelation is acknowledg'd, if what is offer'd as a Subſequent contradicts or is irreconcileable with that, it is certain that both cannot be reveal'd by God, becauſe God cannot contradict himſelf: But a Freedom from ſuch a Contradiction proves only that the latter may be reveal'd, as well as the former. In aſſerting, therefore,

fore, the internal Proofs of the Goſpel Revelation, all we are concern'd to ſhew is, with reſpect to an Unbeliever of all Revelation, that it teaches or preſcribes nothing contrary to any prior Truth, Natural or Moral. With reſpect to thoſe who agree with us in receiving a prior Revelation, that it contains nothing inconſiſtent or contradictory to that. In ſhort, That no internal Objection, of either of theſe Kinds, lyes againſt our admitting it as a Divine Revelation.

Now the Contents of the Goſpel are its Moral Doctrines, Thoſe Articles it propoſes to the Faith, and thoſe poſitive Ordinances it preſcribes to the Obſervance of its Diſciples.

As to the firſt, tho' I am perſuaded, that generally the Reſtraints this Religion lays on the corrupt Luſts and Paſſions of Men, has been the real ground of their Prejudices againſt it; yet few have cared to own this Motive of their Oppoſition to it, or openly to object to the Morality of the Goſpel. All its antient Enemies were

were contented to leave it without Accuſation on this Head, and only to obſerve, that its Rules of this Kind gave it no Pretence to the Character of a Divine Revelation; ſince it informed us in no more than the Improvements natural Reaſon had concluded before, and the Philoſophy of Pagans had taught in a more accurate Method and Digeſtion. But we are at laſt attack'd even on this ſecure Quarter, and are told by a * late Adverſary, that the Morality of the Goſpel is contrary to Reaſon. That what we have been taught to call Vices, are really Actions the moſt beneficial, and moſt conducive to the Happineſs of Mankind: And conſequently, that what have obtain'd the Name of Virtues, are Actions of a deſtructive Tendency, and unnatural Abridgments of human Liberty: And that the Principles under which we have been perſuaded to abhor the one, and reverence the other, are mere Cheat and Impoſition, the Inventions of crafty and deſigning Men. But we may ob-

* Fable of the Bees

ſerve

ſerve with ſome Satisfaction, that tho' the immediate Object of this Writer's Malice be apparently the Chriſtian Religion, upon whoſe Principles and Authority Morality is now eſtabliſh'd among us; yet his Charge lies equally againſt all Rules of Action, which have ever obtained any laſting Eſteem in the rational World: And that the Precepts he objects to as unreaſonable, have been approved and recommended by the moſt celebrated Maſters of Reaſon, Men of the greateſt Capacities and Improvements, in all Ages. They wanted, indeed, what Revelation only cou'd give, a ſufficient Authority to reconcile Mens Submiſſion to their Rules; and a Proſpect of Rewards and Penalties ſufficient to engage their Obſervance, and over-ballance the Paſſions that tempted Men to tranſgreſs them. But their Directions are very much the ſame with the Chriſtian: And they propoſe them, as the wiſeſt and moſt effectual Proviſion for the general Happineſs of Mankind, that Reaſon cou'd deviſe. In Concurrence with this Argument, we may obſerve alſo, that the

greater Part of theſe Rules have been preſcribed by the Wiſdom of all Laws; and wherever any Inſtitution has departed from them, it has been generally cenſured as defective, and contrary both to Prudence, and Juſtice. Thus the beſt and moſt improved Reaſon of Mankind has been uſed to argue, in all Ages, and under all the Diverſity of Religions: And, in the Reſult of its moſt attentive Inquiries, has concluded that Vice is a real Evil, and Virtue a real good; the one the proper Averſion, the other the proper Choice of a reaſonable Nature, and the only ſure Foundation both of perſonal and ſocial Happineſs. But it ſeems, all the Reaſon and Policy in the World have been hitherto perfectly in the Dark; and cou'd not, in ſo many Ages Search, find out the proper Intereſt of Mankind, till this Perſon of deep Thoughts came at laſt and diſcover'd the Secret.

But perhaps it will be ſaid, that this general Approbation of Reaſon we argue from, is only the Notions of a few Speculative Perſons, train'd up in a confined Way

Way of thinking; who, in Confederacy with Civil Authority, have agreed to impoſe and inforce theſe Concluſions on the World. That the bulk of Mankind have always judged otherwiſe; govern'd themſelves by different Maxims; and, wherever they had Liberty, purſued ſuch Vices as were agreeable to their ſeveral Inclinations.

But when we ask, whether a Precept or Action be agreeable to Reaſon, I preſume we mean right Reaſon: Reaſon abſtracted from the Weakneſs or Prejudices, with which it is encumber'd in Particulars. To Reaſon as diverſify'd by the various Luſts, and Ignorance of Individuals, 'tis impoſſible to ſay what is agreeable, or what is not. This is too inconſiſtent and irreconcileable, to be a Meaſure or Standard of Judgment. When we appeal to Reaſon, therefore, we muſt intend ſome fix'd and ſtable Principle, Reaſon in its proper Rectitude and Perfection. And ſurely the Conſent of all thoughtful and inquiſitive Men in all Ages in one Concluſion, is a ſtrong Pre-

ſumption that 'tis agreeable to right Reaſon. Error could hardly be ſo uniform as this. At leaſt, the Concurrence of the moſt improved and moſt attentive Part of Mankind in any Aſſertion, is a better Proof of its Conformity to right Reaſon, than the Concurrence of all the thoughtleſs, ſtupid, inconſiderate Wretches, which compoſe the common Herd of the World, is of the contrary. And yet, in ſome late Arguments, theſe confuſed Sentiments of the Multitude have been complimented as the proper Standard of Reaſon; and Learning, Study, and all the Advantages which are uſually thought to render one Man's Judgment preferable to another, have been repreſented as diſqualifying Men for the Search and Diſcernment of Truth.

But, in the preſent Queſtion, how does it appear, that even this bulk of Mankind are in Judgment againſt us? Why, they have in all Ages follow'd Rules directly oppoſite to ours, and indulged themſelves in ſuch Practices, as the Morality we contend for forbids. But admitting

mitting the Fact, does it follow thence that they have really approved their own Practice, and not acted againſt their own Convictions? Is it an uncommon Thing for Men to acknowledge a Law to be holy, juſt, and good, and yet to tranſgreſs it? But ſuppoſing each has acted with a full Satisfaction of his Reaſon in what he did; yet has any one of them approved all Vices as good, and condemn'd all Virtues as evil?

In a former Diſcourſe, to ſhew the Neceſſity of Revelation, I obſerv'd that no uniform Rule of Action cou'd ever obtain from the Concluſions of an independent Multitude, left every one to judge for himſelf, under the various Diſabilities and Prepoſſeſſions, which muſt ever be expected to prevail among the greater Part of Mankind. The Conſequence of ſuch a State, wou'd certainly be almoſt as many Rules of Action as Men, diverſify'd according to their different Paſſions and Capacities; nor is it imaginable, how they cou'd ever be united under one Rule, but by a Submiſſion

to ſome Authority preſcribing it. But ſtill, to a Looker on, able to abſtract from theſe Particulars, a Concluſion would ariſe, even from this diſſonant Variety of Judgments, in Approbation of Virtue, and Condemnation of Vice. For tho' each would accommodate his Rule to his own Propenſities, and include an Indulgence for his favourite Vices in his Scheme of Morality, yet, where he was under no ſuch Prejudice, he would certainly approve Virtue rather than Vice; approve every Virtue but thoſe he could not reconcile to his own Practice, and condemn every Vice but thoſe he was fond of. And I doubt not, but if every ſingle Virtue were put to the Vote, even of the whole Herd of Mankind, placed in all the Liberty that can be imagin'd, a great Majority would declare for every one: Tho' if the whole Syſtem of Virtues were propoſed together, the various Intereſts of Mens Paſſions, inconſiſtent ſome with one Precept, and ſome with another, would engage, perhaps, a greater Majority to reject it. Nor is it poſſible (as I have

ſaid)

ſaid) for any Principle, but an Authority ſuperior to theſe Paſſions, to reconcile them to it. But ſtill the Inference ſuggeſted upon the whole, would be, that human Reaſon, weak and corrupted as it is, even that Reaſon upon which the Bulk of Mankind act, approves Virtue and condemns Vice, in every Caſe but where a manifeſt Partiality over-rules its Judgment. In like manner, particular Men may object, ſome to one Precept or Reſtraint of the Goſpel, and ſome to another, as they happen to be influenced by an Attachment to their ſeveral Vices; but if each allows the Equity and Uſefulneſs of its Rules, wherever they do not croſs upon his own particular Indulgences, there ariſes from the whole, an Acknowledgment that every Precept of the Goſpel is agreeable to Reaſon. Nay, we may carry the Reflection ſtill farther, and obſerve, that even the Vices Men allow in themſelves they will condemn in others. Will a Thief confeſs it reaſonable that his Confederates ſhould rob him? Or will he who indulges his

Luſts in the Corruption of another's Family, be content the ſame Injury ſhou'd be return'd upon him in his own? If the Action be in its ſelf good and reaſonable, he will certainly be pleas'd it ſhould obtain in univerſal Practice: But if he approves it only in himſelf, and diſlikes it in every one elſe, this is a Demonſtration, that his Judgment in his own Caſe is partial; the Judgment of his Paſſion, and not of his Reaſon. So that he who will take upon him to prove the Morality of the Goſpel repugnant to Reaſon, will argue under the Diſadvantage of contradicting not only the wiſeſt and moſt attentive Men in all Ages, but even the univerſal Confeſſion of Mankind, wherever a manifeſt Partiality has not corrupted their Judgment. And,

To the Suggeſtion, that the thoughtful Part of Mankind have acted inſincerely, and in Confederacy with the Civil Powers have agreed, the one to teach, the other to impoſe their moral Rules on the World, for private Ends

of

of their own, to advance their perſonal or political Authority; we need only anſwer, that we can hardly wiſh for a better Proof of the Reaſonableneſs and Uſefulneſs of theſe Rules, than their being neceſſary for the Eſtabliſhment of Civil Authority, and to provide for the ſocial Welfare of Mankind; or for a ſtronger Argument of this Neceſſity, than ſo general a Concurrence of Legiſlators in directing them.

BUT the moral Duties of Chriſtianity may be prov'd a * *reaſonable Service*, from much higher Principles than theſe, and deduced *a priori* from the Attributes of the Deity. As God in his intellectual Nature is the moſt conſummate Reaſon, ſo the moral Attributes imply'd in the divine Idea, are a Standard of Morality, agreeable to the moſt perfect Reaſon. If therefore, the natural Idea of God repreſents him to us as a Being juſt, holy, merciful, *&c.* we muſt neceſſarily conclude, that

* Rom. 12. 1.

theſe

theſe Qualities are agreeable to the moſt perfect Reaſon. And if 'tis the Duty of every rational Nature to act agreeably to the moſt perfect Reaſon, as far as its Dictates can be diſcover'd, it follows, that the Imitation of the Deity in theſe Virtues, ſo eſſentially imply'd in his Idea, is the Duty of every reaſonable Nature.

Now the moral Preſcriptions of the Goſpel, are plainly conformable to theſe moral Attributes of the Deity; and are recommended to our Obſervance, as an Imitation of the divine Perfections. If, then, theſe moral Attributes are really the proper Character of the Deity, we need no other Argument to prove theſe Preſcriptions agreeable to right Reaſon. If they are not, then, in the Place of that excellent Nature we now worſhip, we muſt ſubſtitute an unjuſt, cruel, unmerciful Being, arm'd with infinite uncontroulable Power; and this terrible deſtructive Idea muſt be the Standard and Meaſure of moral Perfection. Such monſtrous Abſurdities muſt Men run into,

to, who will object to the Reaſonableneſs of the Chriſtian Morality: Before their Arguments will conclude, they muſt degrade Man into a Beaſt, and change the Character of the Deity into that of the Devil.

But I muſt obſerve in this Argument, that the Queſtion before us does not depend on our ſhewing, by direct Proofs, that every moral Precept of the Goſpel is agreeable to Reaſon; but he who will ſet aſide the Revelation on Account of its Morality, muſt prove that ſome Precept, at leaſt, is contrary and irreconcileable to Reaſon. We doubt not, but the Reaſonableneſs of every one may be clearly aſſerted; but ſhould the Action in any Inſtance be found indifferent, neither directed nor condemn'd by Reaſon, this cannot be objected in Diſproof of the Revelation: Becauſe God may, without any Inconſiſtency, be ſuppoſed to preſcribe an Action whoſe Reaſons may not appear to us; and therefore the Revelation may be what it pretends to be, notwithſtanding ſuch Preſcription.

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The Negative, in this Caſe, can be concluded only from a manifeſt Contradiction of ſome moral Precept of the Goſpel to Reaſon: And we deſire to hold our Religion no longer, than till ſuch a Contradiction be proved againſt it.

THE next Point in which we are to vindicate the internal Proofs of the Chriſtian Revelation, is in the Articles it propoſes to our Faith, to which I ſhall now proceed.

SERMON.

SERMON IV.

1 PETER III. 15.

Be ready always to give an Answer, to every Man that asketh you a Reason of the Hope that is in you, with Meekness and Fear.

THE moral Precepts of the Gospel I have endeavou'd to vindicate, from all Objections, which can represent them as an incredible Matter of a divine Revelation. But perhaps it may be thought a Task of greater Difficulty, to remove this Imputation from the Articles proposed to our Faith. Many of these are confess'd incomprehensible

comprehenſible by human Reaſon in its greateſt Improvements, and to be perfectly new and unknown to the World before; and therefore we can neither deduce them, as direct Conſequences from any natural Maxims, or argue their Probability from any prior Conſent of Mankind in them.

IN Vindication of our Religion on this head, it will not be expected I ſhould argue by Induction, and engage in a diſtinct Conſideration of every Article of our Creed; becauſe we ſtand only on the Negative, that the Charge objected cannot be made good againſt any; and it lies on thoſe who oppoſe us, to prove, in ſome Particular, that our Faith is indefenſible.

BUT if we can make it appear,

1ſt. THAT, beyond the Concluſions of natural Reaſon, there may, and muſt be many Truths, relating to the Nature, Will, and Counſels of God, which we cannot diſcover or comprehend;

2*ly*, THAT 'tis very reaſonable to expect, a divine Revelation ſhould contain ſome Propoſitions of this Kind;

3*ly*, THAT when ſuch Propoſitions are reveal'd, tho' they remain as incomprehenſible as they were before, yet we are requir'd, by a clear Principle of Natural Reaſon, to believe them; —— We hope, theſe general Concluſions will eaſily be apply'd to the Defenſe of Particulars: And no Objection will lie againſt any Article, that can affect the Credibility of the Revelation. And,

1*ſt*, I obſerve, that, beyond the Concluſions of Natural Reaſon, there may, and muſt be many Truths relating to the Will and Counſels of God, which we cannot diſcover or comprehend.

'TIS certain, Truth does not depend on our Perceptions, but on the real Relation, the Agreement or Diſagreement of ſome Ideas with others; which is the ſame, whether perceiv'd by us or not.

A Concluſion in Mathematicks, or any other Science, was as true before any Man diſcover'd it, as it is ſince its Diſcovery; and is as true when propoſed to an Idiot, as when propoſed to the moſt acute Philoſopher. The gradual Advances of human Reaſon in what it does know, the Boundaries that ſtop its Progreſs and confine its Perceptions, oblige us to conclude, that there muſt be many Truths beyond our Diſcovery or Comprehenſion. We ſee Effects, for which we cannot aſſign any certain Cauſe: We acknowledge the Exiſtence of many Beings, whoſe Attributes we cannot aſcertain; and are often forced to content our ſelves with ſuperficial Deſcriptions, from the little that appears to us, inſtead of Definitions drawn from Nature. Our Proſpect is terminated by a narrow Horizon, and our Knowledge imperfect, even within that Circle. In many Objects that are neareſt to us, we can look no deeper than outward Appearances: Of thoſe which are more remote, we ſee only one Side. As we proceed towards the Extremity of the Landſcape, the Images grow

grow faint, and the Objects are ſo diminiſh'd, crouded and confuſed, that we diſcern little with any Diſtinction. So far as we clearly perceive the real Agreement or Diſagreement of Things, we affirm or deny with Certainty: And the Truths we thus diſcover, we apply as Rules and Meaſures in farther Inquiries. Where the Object is within our Reach, if our Rule is adequate to it, and we apply it with due Care, we have the ſame Aſſurance in the Concluſion, as we had in the Premiſes whence we deduce it. But where the Diſtance of the Object is ſuch that we cannot reach it, or its Diſproportion to our Rule ſuch that it cannot be meaſured by it, we are left to Opinion and Conjecture. So far as we meaſure it we pronounce with Certainty; but all we affirm beyond, is that there is a real Being, but what its Attributes or Relations are, we cannot determine. We may conclude indeed negatively, that they are not contrary or irreconcileable to what we have diſcover'd; we are ſo far ſure what cannot be affirm'd of it; but farther than

that we can affirm or deny nothing, but from our Conjecture, or the Reports of an Underſtanding ſuperiour to our own. In the Queſtion before us, all that human Reaſon can diſcover of the Nature of God, is that He is infinitely wiſe, juſt, good, powerful, *&c.* in ſhort, a Being poſſeſs'd of all imaginable Perfection. But when we examine this Idea with Attention, it amounts to no more than this — We collect together all the Perfections of which we have any determinate Notion, all the Attributes by which we conceive one Being preferable to another, and unite them in God; and ſo far the Idea is poſitive: But then the Infinity we aſcribe to theſe Attributes, and which renders them the diſtinctive Idea of God, is only a Negation of Limits and Circumſcription. As when the Eye looks upon a Line or Superficies ſuppoſed to be infinitely extended, ſo far as our View reaches, we have a determinate poſitive Object; but the Immenſity we affirm beyond that, lies all in the dark, and is in Truth only a Negation of Bounds. Thus it is in the

the Idea of God: So far as the Perfections we combine in it, are exhibited to us in our own, or other Natures whence we collect them, the Object is within our View; the Idea, both of the Particulars, and of the Aggregate ariſing from their Union, is poſitive: But the Infinity, to which we extend the Idea beyond that, is only a Negative. Reaſon cannot fix, or permit us to conceive, any Bounds; and therefore requires us to believe there are none: And what we affirm, is that He is wiſe without Limits to his Wiſdom, powerful without Limits to his Power, *&c.* Now ſo far as this Idea is poſitive, natural Reaſon may conclude with Certainty, and reject any Affirmation that is contrary to it, as incompatible with the divine Nature. Should any Book or Syſtem of Doctrine offer'd to us as a divine Revelation, affirm any Thing of God inconſiſtent with Wiſdom, Goodneſs, Juſtice, *&c.* this muſt appear to us a manifeſt Falſhood, and therefore impoſſible to be reveal'd by God. The general Negation of Limits

to the divine Perfections, being alſo a certain Concluſion of Reaſon, whatever Doctrine ſets any other Limits to theſe Perfections, but what one Attribute neceſſarily ſets to another, muſt appear irreconcileable with the divine Idea, and conſequently cannot be admitted as a divine Revelation. But then, in that immenſe Blank (as to our Conceptions) which the Infinity of this Idea implies, beyond theſe Concluſions, Reaſon cannot but acknowledge, that there may, and muſt be innumerable Attributes of the Deity, which it cannot diſcover: And if any Attribute of this Kind be affirm'd of God, Reaſon is perfectly ſuſpended, and cannot, by any Light or Principles of its own, perceive whether the Affirmation be true or falſe. It may be true, tho' Reaſon does not diſcern it to be ſo; and ſince it does not diſcern it to be falſe, it cannot pronounce it to be falſe. If, therefore, ſuch a Propoſition be offer'd to us as affirm'd by God, Reaſon cannot, by any internal Argument drawn from the Matter of it, prove that 'tis not affirm'd by God; be-

becauſe it may be true for any Thing Reaſon can determine to the contrary; and what may be true, God, who certainly knows whether it be true or not, may affirm. He who attempts to diſprove a Revelation by internal Objections drawn from the Matter it contains, muſt argue *ab abſurdo;* and can ſucceed only by ſhewing, that we cannot admit it to be ſo, without contradicting ſome evident or confeſs'd Truth. Such a Truth we acknowledge it to be, that God cannot affirm a Falſhood: But we can never be reduced to the Abſurdity of contradicting this Principle, by admitting a Propoſition to be reveal'd by God, in which we can perceive neither Truth nor Falſhood. For Inſtance: That God is one neceſſarily exiſtent Being, is a Concluſion of natural Reaſon, imply'd in the divine Idea; and therefore any Propoſition contradicting that Concluſion, we are ſure cannot be affirm'd by God. But the Manner of the divine Exiſtence, is a Subject perfectly in the dark, as to us; natural Reaſon cannot affirm or deny any Thing about it.

Suppoſe then it is offer'd to us as a divine Revelation, that this one God exiſts in three Perſons. The Propoſition is certainly incomprehenſible by us, we cannot, by any Light of our own, perceive it to be true ; but neither can we perceive it to be falſe. He who aſſerts that God does not exiſt in a Trinity of Perſons, has no more Perception of Truth in his Negative, than he who aſſerts that he does ſo exiſt, has in his Affirmative. All we contend for is, that the Affirmative is not evidently falſe ; and if it be not, 'tis no Contradiction to the Principle that God cannot reveal a Falſhood, to admit this as reveal'd by God. Whether it be reveal'd or not is an Inquiry of Fact, and depends on external Proofs.

WHAT we have obſerv'd concerning the divine Nature, may alſo by Parity of Argument be apply'd to the divine Counſels. If in a Book or Syſtem offer'd as a divine Revelation, any Counſel or Reſolution ſhould be aſcribed to God, which is manifeſtly incompatible with

with the Attributes imply'd in the divine Idea, this would be a juſt Reaſon for rejecting the Revelation: But if the Reſolution declared to be from God, neither exceeds his Power, nor is inconſiſtent with his Goodneſs, Juſtice, *&c.* to perform; no negative Objection can lye againſt the Credibility of the Revelation, on Account of the Matter of ſuch Reſolution: It cannot but be acknowledg'd poſſible; and if God may perform it, it depends purely on his Pleaſure, whether he will perform it or not: And when the Revelation is proved, his Pleaſure is proved.

I hope, then, it appears that there are, and muſt be many Truths relating to the Nature of God incomprehenſible to us: Theſe are as truly affirmable of God, as thoſe Attributes which natural Reaſon aſcribes to Him. I have not troubled myſelf to prove that God may reveal them to us, becauſe I preſume, no one who underſtands the Terms of the Propoſition can deny it. Suppoſe then this poſſible Thing ſhould

come to paſs, and God ſhould reveal them; they would not be one Jot more comprehenſible to us than they were before. The Habitudes and Relations of the Ideas on which their Truth depends, are beyond the Reach of our Faculties, and we ſhall no more perceive them when affirm'd by God, than if they were affirm'd by any one elſe; and therefore our not perceiving them to be true, is no Proof that they are not reveal'd by God. This Negative can be inferr'd only from our perceiving them not to be true; and then we confeſs it impoſſible for us to believe that God affirms them: But they may be reveal'd by God, notwithſtanding we cannot comprehend, or perceive the Truth of them.

2ly, THEN, let us next inquire, Whether, ſuppoſing a divine Revelation ſhould be made, it be reaſonable to expect that ſuch Propoſitions ſhould be contain'd in it: For if ſuch Propoſitions be not only a poſſible, but a probable Matter of a divine Revelation, our finding them in any Book

or

or Syſtem of Doctrine, cannot with any Colour be urged as a Diſproof of its being a divine Revelation. Now the only imaginable Ends of a divine Revelation to Men, muſt be to direct them to Happineſs and Duty; to engage them to purſue the one, by performing the other. An Acknowledgment of the divine Attributes, Reaſon it ſelf muſt ſuggeſt as one of the firſt Duties we owe to God, becauſe 'tis the Foundation of all others. And infallible Truth is one of thoſe Attributes, and one whoſe Acknowledgment God may be ſuppoſed eſpecially to require in this Caſe, becauſe the Authority of the whole Revelation depends upon it. And if the only Evidence we can give of our acknowledging the infallible Truth of God, be aſſenting to what He affirms upon his Authority, it is very reaſonable to expect that God ſhou'd require this Evidence from us. Now in aſſenting to a Propoſition, whoſe Truth we perceive from the Reaſon of the Thing, we do not aſſent upon any Authority at all: We ſhould aſſent to ſuch a Propoſition, tho' it were affirmed by the

the moſt fallible Man, nay by the moſt notorious Liar in the World; and conſequently, our aſſenting to ſuch a Propoſition, is no manner of Proof that we acknowledge the infallible Veracity of God. This can only appear, by our aſſenting to a Propoſition, whoſe Truth we do not perceive by any Evidence from the Nature of the Thing. We here aſſent upon the Authority of God's Affirmation, and our Aſſent is a moſt explicit Acknowledgment of the infallible Veracity of God. If then it be reaſonable to expect in a divine Revelation, that God ſhould require our Acknowledgment of this Attribute, and ſuch Acknowledgment can appear only by our aſſenting, upon the Authority of God, to ſuch Propoſitions whoſe Truth we cannot perceive by any internal Evidence; it is reaſonable to expect ſuch Propoſitions in a divine Revelation: And what we may reaſonably expect in a divine Revelation, can never be objected in Diſproof of its being ſo. Propoſitions of this Kind, as I have obſerv'd, may be either Doctrines concerning the divine Nature, or Declarations

tions of the Will and Counſels of God. That there are many Truths, relating to each of theſe, beyond the Reach or Compaſs of our Perceptions or Deductions, Reaſon it ſelf muſt confeſs. How many of theſe, or of which Sort God ſhall at any Time reveal, depends wholly on his Pleaſure. They are all equally unſearchable by us, and equally revealable by God. And ſince 'tis reaſonable to expect ſome ſuch inevident Propoſitions in a divine Revelation, and no Rule of Reaſon determines either their Number or their Subject, neither the Quality, Number, nor Subject of ſuch Propoſitions can amount to a Diſproof of the Revelation in which they are found. I go on then, and obſerve

3ly, That when ſuch Articles are revealed by God, we are obliged by a clear Principle of natural Reaſon to believe them. And if, as ſoon as we ſuppoſe them revealed by God, they are very credible, their Incredibility before cannot be objected in Diſproof of the Revelation. For nothing can be more unreaſonable,

ſonable, than to object that in Diſproof of a Suppoſition, which the Suppoſition it ſelf takes away.

THAT Authority is, in ſome Caſes, a juſt Ground of Aſſent, cannot be denied. The proper Subject of this Aſſent is ſuch Propoſitions as we can neither perceive to be true or falſe, from the Nature of the Thing. Where we clearly perceive Truth, we aſſent to it indeed, but (as I obſerved) not upon any Authority at all: And what we clearly perceive to be falſe, we cannot aſſent to upon any Authority, becauſe no Authority can overweigh the plain Evidence of the Thing. But where the Matter of a Propoſition is purely inevident to us, if it be affirm'd by a Perſon whoſe Knowledge and Fidelity we can rely on, we have juſt Grounds to aſſent to it; and our Aſſent, in this Caſe, is more or leſs firm and reaſonable, in the ſame Proportion that our Preſumption of the Perſon's Knowledge and Honeſty is ſo: but where the Affirmer is a Perſon of infinite Knowledge and Truth, who can neither deceive

ceive, nor be deceived, we have the utmoſt Aſſurance of the Truth of ſuch a Propoſition that can be given; and we muſt act in Contradiction to Reaſon, if we refuſe our Aſſent to it. The Matter indeed of the Propoſition remains ſtill in its natural Obſcurity: We can no more perceive the Connexion of Ideas affirmed of each other, than we did before; but we are now aſſured there is ſuch a Connexion, becauſe God, who certainly knows whether there be or not, and who cannot deceive us, has affirm'd that there is: The Credibility of the Affirmation does not depend on the Matter of it, but on the Evidences we have of the Revelation: When that is proved credible, the Propoſition is no longer incredible. Nay, tho' it were not only inevident, but even improbable before, yet, if it be not ſimply impoſſible, it becomes credible upon the Affirmation of ſo high an Authority. And therefore 'tis trifling to tell us, we ought not to proceed to the outward Evidences of the Revelation, till we have aſcertain'd the Truth of ſuch Propoſitions contain'd

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in it; becauſe the Proof of the Revelation draws after it, by neceſſary Conſequence, the Credibility of the Propoſitions; and therefore is in the order of Reaſoning the firſt Queſtion: And requiring us to reverſe this Order, is requiring us to prove a Concluſion independently on the proper Premiſſes whence 'tis to be inferr'd.

WHAT has been offer'd, we hope, will ſupply us with a ſatisfactory Defence of the Goſpel Revelation, from any internal Objection on Account of the Articles it propoſes to our Faith. That it requires our Belief of any one which contradicts any clear Principle or Deduction of Reaſon, we deny. That it requires our Aſſent to ſeveral which exceed our Comprehenſion, *i. e.* whoſe Truth we cannot perceive from any internal Evidence, we confeſs. But then we contend that no Argument can be drawn from theſe in Diſproof of the Revelation. Becauſe, 1ſt, Reaſon muſt acknowledge, that beyond thoſe Concluſions which are in its View, there may

and

and must be many Truths relating to the Nature, Will, and Counsels of God, which we cannot comprehend; and that God may, if He pleases, reveal them to us. And therefore, tho' the Gospel does affirm such incomprehensible Conclusions to us, yet still we may believe it to be a divine Revelation, without contradicting that Principle, that God can affirm nothing but Truth. 2ly. That 'tis reasonable to expect a divine Revelation should propose some Articles of this Kind to the Faith of Men; and therefore the Gospel's proposing such Articles to us, is no more than we must reasonably expect it should do, if it were a divine Revelation; and consequently can be no Disproof of its being one.

3ly, That when such Articles are reveal'd, tho' they remain as incomprehensible as they were before, yet they are no longer incredible; but Reason itself obliges us to assent to them, as affirmed by the infallible Veracity of God; and therefore the natural Incredibility of such Articles of the Gospel, is no Bar to its

its direct Proofs; but ceaſes it ſelf, as ſoon as thoſe Proofs are made good; and conſequently ought to be ſuſpended, and wait on the Reſult of that Inquiry.

The poſitive Ordinances of the Chriſtian Religion are another Part of the Matter of the Goſpel, but Reaſon cannot from theſe raiſe any Objection, that can diſcredit the Revelation. It will not, I preſume, be pretended, that outward Ordinances are inconſiſtent with the Nature of Religion: And thoſe injoyn'd us are few, ſignificant, and proper for the Intention to which they are directed. We are taught, indeed, to expect divine Graces, internal Works of God on the Soul, in Conſequence of our Obſervance of them; but ſurely there is nothing impoſſible or improbable in this Doctrine. It is not pretended that they convey theſe Graces by any natural Efficacy, but purely by a divine Inſtitution. And cannot God beſtow His own Favours on what Conditions, annex them to what Actions He pleaſes? But I need not much enlarge on this Head, becauſe, tho' ſome Adverſaries

Adverſaries have with impious Scorn blaſphemed theſe holy Rites, as Conjurations and ridiculous Superſtitions; yet I do not remember, that they have been objected to in any ſerious Pretence of diſproving our Religion. And for the ſame Reaſon I ſhall not detain you with vindicating either the Articles of our Faith, or the Rites of our Worſhip, as conſiſtent with all precedent Revelations. For tho' much invidious Pains has been taken by a late Enemy, to invalidate the Appeal which the Goſpel makes to the *Jewiſh* Revelation; yet nothing that he has offer'd affects the internal Matter, but only the Atteſtation, which is an external Proof. He does not pretend to ſhew that the Goſpel contains any Thing contradictory or inconſiſtent with the Doctrines, Prophecies, or Preſcriptions which God deliver'd to the *Jews*; and thence to infer negatively, that we cannot admit the Goſpel Revelation, conſiſtently with our acknowledgment of the *Jewiſh*. But what he undertakes to ſhew is, that the Teſtimonies which the Goſpel ap-

peals to in the *Jewiſh* Writings as bearing Witneſs to it, do not conclude what they are alledg'd for; or do not prove poſitively that it is a divine Revelation. When the outward and direct Proofs of the Goſpel are in Queſtion, what he has objected has a Right to be conſider'd; but in the preſent Argument, all we are concern'd to evince is, that there appears nothing in the Matter of the Goſpel, which can render it irreconcileable with the *Jewiſh* Revelation; and therefore we may admit the one, without being obliged to contradict, or give up the other. The Goſpel, it is confeſs'd, makes fuller and more particular Diſcoveries of the Nature, Will, and Counſels of God, than the former Revelations; but it teaches nothing inconſiſtent with them. And tho' God cannot contradict Himſelf, yet He may reveal more at one Time than at another; and therefore no Difference, but what implies a Contradiction, can render our Belief of a latter Revelation, inconſiſtent with our Belief of a former. And if, as I preſume it might be ſhewn

there are in the former Revelations ſome Hints, tho' dark and imperfect, even of thoſe Doctrines of the Goſpel which are moſt objected to; if many Obſcurities of the *Jewiſh* Scriptures are made clear and intelligible by theſe Doctrines, This advances ſomething towards a direct Proof of the Goſpel Revelation. It does not, we confeſs, certainly conclude, becauſe 'tis poſſible for human Skill and Cunning, ſo far to adapt what it offers as ſubſequent Revelation to one before receiv'd, as to give it the Advantage of this Appearance: But then ſuch a Correſpondence is a good Diſproof of any pretended Inconſiſtency between them, with regard to theſe Doctrines; which is all we have Occaſion to infer in the preſent Argument.

So likewiſe, with reſpect to the Rites or poſitive Ordinances of the Goſpel, all Inſtitutions of this Kind being in their Nature indifferent, neither morally good nor evil, they muſt be confeſs'd alterable by God. He may annex his Graces to what Ordinances He thinks

fit; their Efficacy depends meerly on his Pleaſure, and therefore He may, without any Inconſiſtency, abrogate one Scheme, and appoint another in the Place of it. But if there be a relative Harmony between thoſe of a former, and thoſe of a latter, Inſtitution; if it be among the Predictions of a prior Revelation, that the Rites preſcribed under it ſhou'd ceaſe, and be ſucceeded by another Order of Worſhip; ſuch a Change is rather an Argument in Favour of a ſubſequent Revelation, than againſt it; but from any Objection of Inconſiſtency on Account of ſuch Change, it is a full Vindication.

UPON the whole, I hope, whoever attends to the preceding Reflections, will not want an Anſwer to him who ſhall attempt to diſprove the Goſpel Revelation, by any internal Objections, ariſing from the Matter of it: That nothing can be charg'd either on the Morality, the Faith, or the Ordinances of our Religion, that can render it incredible that God ſhou'd reveal it. This

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is all the internal Proof that any Revelation, in the Nature of the Thing, admits of. But then it muſt be remember'd, that, in conſequence of theſe Proofs, we are got no farther than that it may be a divine Revelation; whether it be ſo or not, depends on the Validity of its external and direct Proofs; in Aſſertion of which I ſhall offer ſomething in a farther Inquiry.

SERMON V.

JOHN X. 25.

The Works that I do in my Father's Name, bear Witneſs of me.

THE many Impoſtures which have prevail'd on the Credulity of Mankind as divine Revelations, are juſt Reaſons for examining the Credentials of any Perſon, and trying, by the beſt Scrutiny in our Power, whatever Doctrine or Religion offers itſelf to us under that Character. Now, the only Topicks whence we can argue in this Inquiry, are (as I have ob-

ſerved) either the internal Contents of the ſuppoſed Revelation, or the external Evidences of its Derivation from God. I have endeavour'd to vindicate the internal Proofs of the Goſpel, (*i. e.*) to ſhew, that no Objection lies againſt the Matter of it, which obliges us to conclude that it cannot be from God: And am therefore at Liberty to proceed to its external Proofs, the Atteſtations of God to it. The Teſtimony of God to a Perſon propoſing any Doctrine or Religion as from Him, muſt appear either by immediate Declarations of God himſelf, or by manifeſt Communications of divine Power or Knowledge to ſuch Perſon; or, where a precedent Revelation is receiv'd, by the Teſtimony of that Revelation.

THE Goſpel was propoſed to the Faith of Mankind, with the Evidence of all theſe Kinds of Proof. The Miſſion of *Jeſus Chriſt*, the firſt Teacher of this Religion, was more than once acknowledg'd by a Voice from Heaven. Both He and his Apoſtles after him, wrought

ſuch

ſuch Miracles in Confirmation of it, as carry the cleareſt Evidence of *the Finger of God* *, Works ſuch as *None cou'd do except God was with him* †. It was alſo atteſted by the *Jewiſh* Revelation, to which it ſucceeds; in whoſe Rites it was prefigured, and in whoſe Predictions it was foretold. The Argument from the *Jewiſh* Propheſies has been excellently vindicated by much abler Hands than mine, from the Attempts of a late ‖ Writer to diſcredit it. But becauſe this Adverſary has by an inſidious Sleight, endeavour'd to divert Mens Attention from the ** Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, as an improper Proof, and of no Weight in this Inquiry; and perſuaded them to put the whole Iſſue of the Queſtion on the Evidence he took upon him to examine, excluſive of this; It is my preſent Intention to aſſert the Force of this Proof, which our Lord in my Text appeals to,

* Exod. viii. 19.
† John iii. 2.
‖ *Grounds and Reaſons of the Chriſtian Religion.*
** Part I. Sect. 7.

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as bearing the moſt unexceptionable Witneſs to his Miſſion. And if, in ſtating the proper Extent and Application of this Proof, how far it concludes, and by what Objections it is barr'd, I am obliged to recal ſome Things which have been before obſerv'd, I hope the Repetition will be excuſed.

I. Now, 'tis confeſs'd, that Miracles are not a ſufficient Proof that what is propoſed as a divine Revelation really is ſo, when it contains ſuch Doctrines as 'tis impoſſible ſhould proceed from God. If, for Inſtance, it repreſents God as unjuſt, unholy, *&c.* as commanding or approving ſuch Actions, as natural Conſcience condemns; or affirming any manifeſt Untruth, natural or moral: Becauſe nothing can appear to us with greater Evidence than the Truths which ſuch Doctrines muſt contradict; and conſequently whatever contradicts them, muſt appear falſe; neither is it poſſible for any external Proof to convince us, that God, whoſe very Idea includes eſſential Goodneſs, and eſſential Truth, can

can command what we manifeſtly perceive to be evil, or affirm what we manifeſtly perceive to be falſe. He may indeed affirm what we cannot perceive to be true, and if we have ſufficient Evidence that He does affirm it, Reaſon will oblige us to believe it upon his Authority. But we cannot, upon any Authority, aſſent to what we clearly perceive to be falſe. And therefore, whenever his Authority is vouch'd for an evident Falſhood, we are aſſured, even to Demonſtration, that the Perſon who vouches it, is either deceiv'd himſelf, or intends to deceive us. Neither can any Appearance of Miracles overrule this Aſſurance; becauſe 'tis more reaſonable for us to ſuſpect either the Impoſture of Men, or the Deluſion of the Devil in ſuch apparent Miracles, than to believe that God can affirm an evident Falſhood.

II. WHERE a prior Revelation is acknowledg'd, Miracles are not a ſufficient Proof of a ſubſequent, if the Matter of it contradicts, or is inconſiſtent with

with that former Revelation. For the Contents of that former Revelation being all aſſented to as undoubted Truths, upon the Authority of God, 'tis impoſſible for us, while we ſo aſſent to it, to admit a ſecond upon his Authority, which is contrary to or ſubverſive of That; Becauſe God cannot contradict himſelf; and therefore we cannot, upon any outward Evidences, admit Inconſiſtences, as affirm'd to us by his Authority. And this is the Ground of that Caution given by *Moſes* to the *Iſraelites*, * *If there ariſe among you a Prophet* —— *and he giveth thee a Sign or a Wonder, and the Sign or the Wonder come to paſs, whereof he ſpake unto thee, ſaying, let us go after other Gods and ſerve them; Thou ſhalt not hearken unto the Words of that Prophet.* And agreeably St. *Paul* requires from all who had receiv'd the Chriſtian Revelation, which he had taught, that even the greateſt Appearance of a Miſſion from God, even an † *Angel from Heaven*

* Deut. xiii.
† Galat. i. 8.

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ſhou'd not be heard in Contradiction to it. And the plain Reaſon is, becauſe, as I have ſaid, 'tis impoſſible that God ſhou'd affirm to us Inconſiſtences: If therefore, in ſuch a Caſe, we admit the latter as a divine Revelation, we muſt neceſſarily give up the former; if we adhere to the former, we muſt reject the latter: And which ever we reject, we ſhall alſo reject the Miracles which appear'd to atteſt it, as Deluſions or Impoſtures.

It is then confeſſed, that Miracles cannot convince us of a divine Revelation, where the Matter propoſed as ſuch is inconſiſtent with any prior acknowledg'd Truth, natural, or reveal'd. And thus far I can agree with the foremention'd Writer, That * *where the Foundation* of a Revelation *is invalid, Miracles cannot make it valid.* Till theſe negative Objections are removed, no poſitive Proofs can be admitted. But then it muſt be remember'd, that when they are removed, we are got no farther

* *Grounds and Reaſons*, p. 32.

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than this Concluſion, That what is propoſed may be a divine Revelation; Whether it be or not, muſt be determin'd by poſitive Proofs: Which, if we ſet aſide immediate Revelation to our ſelves, can be no other than either the Teſtimony of a precedent Revelation, or ſome manifeſt Communication of the Knowledge, or Power of God to the Perſon who propoſes it to us; (*i. e.*) either a Spirit of Propheſy, or a Power of working Miracles. I can imagine no other external Proof, by which it can appear that any Perſon is ſent by God, and ſpeaks to us by his Authority: And the moſt unexceptionable of theſe is Miracles. For as to the Teſtimony of a preceding Revelation, this can ariſe only from the Application of certain propheſy'd Marks and Characters; and 'tis eaſy for a Man of any Skill and Foreſight who has theſe Marks before him, ſo to accommodate his Life, Actions, and all Appearances to them, as to deceive even an attentive Judgment: And therefore this is a Proof, when ſingle and alone, the leaſt to be depend-

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ed on of any. A Spirit of Propheſy muſt appear to us, either by the Perſons telling us Things paſt, or foretelling Things to come. Now the Knowledge of Things paſt may be acquired by ſo many other Ways beſides Revelation, that tho', where we cannot preſently account for it, it may ſurprize us; yet it can hardly leave the Mind without ſome Diſtruſt of Impoſture; and, without the Concurrence of other Proofs, a very imperfect Aſſurance can ariſe from this. The Prediction of remote Events, in their Nature perfectly contingent, is indeed, when fulfill'd, a clear inconteſtable Evidence of a Spirit of Propheſy; but then this affords no preſent Conviction, we muſt wait, perhaps a long Time, for our Concluſion. The Perſon whoſe Faith is to be engaged by this Argument may be dead, before its Force commences. But Miracles carry with them a clear, poſitive, preſent Evidence of the Finger of God. Where the Action is ſuch as manifeſtly exceeds human Power, we cannot help acknowledging the Concurrence of ſome ſuperiour,

riour, inviſible Agent. We can imagine none but good or evil Spirits. If we ſuppoſe good Spirits, the Action terminates in God, and is under his ſpecial Direction: If evil Spirits, the Doctrine it atteſts will betray their Character. If therefore ſuch ſupernatural Actions are wrought, and the Doctrine atteſted by them is free from all ſuch negative Objections, as aſſure us it cannot be from God, we have the utmoſt Evidence of a divine Revelation that can be given us.

LET us then apply what has been obſerved in general, to the Chriſtian Revelation. If it contradicts, or is inconſiſtent with any prior Truth, natural, or reveal'd, this is confeſs'd a fundamental Defect, which no Appearance of Miracles can over-rule, or ſupply. But this, we preſume, never has been, nor ever can be proved againſt it. Neither is there in the late Attempt to diſparage its Evidences, any Thing of this Character objected to it. All that is pretended, is that ſome of its Proofs from

from the precedent Revelation are inſufficiently deduced.

Now I might obſerve in general, that 'tis not in the Nature of the Thing neceſſary, that a ſubſequent Revelation ſhou'd derive any Proof from a former. That it muſt be conſiſtent, is acknowledg'd; But God may certainly make two Revelations as well as one, and, if they are reconcileable, we are obliged upon equal Evidence to admit both; and Miracles are as good a Proof of the one, as they were of the other: Neither is there any Neceſſity, that before we admit the latter, we ſhould firſt be convinced of the former.

But I am ſenſible it may be, and is inſiſted, that the Chriſtian Revelation ſuppoſes, and is built upon the *Jewiſh* as its Foundation: That the Character which *Jeſus Chriſt* aſſumed, was that of the *Meſſiah*, a Perſon promiſed and delineated in the Law and the Prophets: And accordingly, both Chriſt and his Apoſtles appeal to theſe Propheſies,

and apply them as giving Evidence to his Pretenſions: And conſequently the Trial of Chriſtianity is in Effect put upon this Iſſue; and unleſs the Validity of this Appeal can be ſuppoſed, Miracles, excluſive of this Teſtimony, will not be a ſufficient Evidence.

In Abatement of this Plea it has been ſometimes obſerved, that this State of the Queſtion concerns only the *Jews*, who had received the former Revelation. That to the reſt of the World, the firſt and moſt proper Evidence of the Chriſtian Revelation, were the Miracles which atteſted it, which no Reaſon obliged them to poſtpone to any other Conſideration. This is undoubtedly true, with Regard to the firſt Reception of Chriſtianity. The Converts, for Inſtance, whom St. *Paul* gain'd at *Athens* upon the ſingle Force of this Proof, had certainly ſufficient Grounds for their Belief. But then, whoever upon this Evidence had acknowledged the Goſpel Revelation, when he came to find that Chriſt had taken upon him the particu-

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lar Character of the *Meſſiah*, and that both He and his Apoſtles had appealed to the Law and the Prophets as bearing Teſtimony to this Pretenſion, might reaſonably demand to have this Pretenſion ſupported, and their Veracity in theſe Allegations made good. Upon the whole therefore, this State of the Queſtion cannot be refuſed: And I am content to proceed upon it, and conſider, whether Miracles are ſo uſeleſs an Evidence in this Inquiry, as has been pretended.

Now, where a former Revelation has prepared Men, to expect ſome particular Perſon to be ſent from God, with a farther and more full Commiſſion from him; Miracles are not a ſufficient Proof that any one is that Perſon, unleſs he alſo anſwers the particular Characters under which that Perſon was foretold. Thus when *Moſes* had told the *Iſraelites*, that God would * *raiſe up unto them a Prophet, from the midſt of them, of their Brethren, like unto Him*, to whom they

* Deut. xviii. 15.

ſhould *hearken*; If any one who was not *of their Brethren*, of the Houſe of *Iſrael*, had pretended to be *that Prophet*, whatever Appearance of Miracles had attended him, He could not have been acknowledg'd under that Character. When the Expectation of *that Prophet* was afterwards confined to the Houſe and Lineage of *David*; that, and, for the ſame Reaſons, all other particular Marks under which He was deſcribed, might juſtly be inſiſted on, before any Perſon was acknowledg'd to be *that Prophet*: Neither could Miracles prove him to be ſo, in Contradiction to thoſe Circumſtances. But theſe Circumſtances being applicable to conſiderable Numbers, they could not of themſelves determinately point out the promiſed Perſon. To him indeed it was foretold theſe Marks ſhould agree,—— He ſhould be an *Iſraelite*, of the Houſe of *David*, born at *Bethlehem*, &c. and he who was not ſo, could not be that Perſon. But among the Multitudes who would come within theſe Deſcriptions, ſomething farther was requiſite, to diſtinguiſh him who was to be receiv'd as the *Meſſiah*.

Meſſiah. It was firſt and primarily neceſſary, that he ſhould appear to be ſent by God. This the Nature of the Thing required; and this alſo the Jewiſh Predictions aſſign'd as a fundamental Part of his Character. Thus in that of *Moſes*, He is deſcribed as one to be *rais'd up by God*; and how could that more evidently appear, than by the Power of God ſhewing forth itſelf in Him? He was to be *like unto Moſes:* And how could that Likeneſs be viſible, in any Character which could engage the Submiſſion of the *Jews*, but in ſuch a Power of Miracles as had engaged their Submiſſion to *Moſes?* In ſhort, He muſt firſt appear to be ſent by God, of which Miracles were a proper Evidence. That He was that particular Perſon whom God has promiſed to ſend, muſt appear from his anſwering thoſe ſpecial Marks, under which that Perſon was deſcribed. A Concurrence of both theſe Proofs was neceſſary, to aſſure their Faith in *him*, whom they were to acknowledge as the *Meſſiah;* neither could the one be concluſive without the other. It is therefore a moſt unreaſonable *Poſtulatum*, to

require us in this Argument to ſet aſide Miracles as no Evidence; becauſe, 1*ſt*, a very material Part of the Queſtion before us is, whether *Jeſus Chriſt* was a Perſon ſent by God, of which no better Proof could be given than Miracles, or viſible Effects of Divine Power attending him. 2*dly*, Since, among the particular Predictions of that Perſon promiſed to the *Jews*, it was foretold, that He *ſhould* * *be like unto Moſes*; That † *the Spirit of God ſhould reſt upon Him.* Miracles are alſo a proper and ſpecifick Evidence in this Part of the Queſtion, as the ſureſt Mark or Proof of the Character here foretold. And accordingly it appears from the Hiſtory of the Goſpels, that the *Jews* expected their *Meſſiah* ſhould be diſtinguiſh'd by this Power. Thus when *Jeſus* perſuaded them to believe on him, they reply, —— † *What Sign ſheweſt thou that we may believe? what doſt thou work?* Upon the Sight of his Miracles they immediately cry out,—— ‖ *Is not this the Son of David?* And they who

* Deut. xviii.
† Iſ. xi. 2.
† John vi. 30.
‖ Matt. xii. 23.

believed

believed on Him, profeſs themſelves convinced by this Proof. Thus * *Many believed on him and ſaid, When Chriſt cometh, ſhall he do greater Miracles than theſe?* And upon another Occaſion, *When they had ſeen the Miracle that Jeſus did*, they preſently concluded— † *This is of a Truth that Prophet which ſhould come.* It appears then, that the *Jews* expected their *Meſſiah* ſhould work Miracles, and that this ſhould be one diſcriminating Mark of him. If this was not foretold of him, how came they to require this Power in Him, more than in other Prophets? And if it was foretold of Him, then 'tis ridiculous to pretend that any one's Claim to this Character ought to be tried by the Propheſies, excluſive of Miracles, becauſe the Propheſies themſelves refer to Miracles, as a diſtinguiſhing Part of that Character.

BUT I go on to examine this Pretenſe farther. It is acknowledg'd that a Contradiction to, or even a want of other Marks aſſign'd in the Propheſies of the

* John viii. 31.
† John ii. 11.

Meſſiah, would be ſuch a Diſproof of any ones Pretenſions to that Title, as no Appearance of Miracles could over-rule: Becauſe no one Mark could conclude without, or in Contradiction to, others equally requir'd: But then theſe Defects muſt be plain and apparent. The Propheſies, ſuppoſed to be contradicted, muſt be ſuch as evidently related to the *Meſſiah*, and the Circumſtances ſuppoſed to be defective, muſt be certain and determinate: If the Application in theſe Caſes be doubtful and uncertain, no Objection ſuggeſted by it, can ſet aſide ſo direct a Proof, as Miracles wrought in Atteſtation of any Perſon's being the *Meſſiah*. If the Author whom I oppoſe in this Concluſion, could have produced any plain Propheſy of the *Meſſiah*, or any plain Mark under which he was foretold, and ſhewn that it was either contradicted, or not anſwer'd by *Jeſus Chriſt*, he would have offer'd ſomething in Bar to the Evidence ariſing from his Miracles. But all he has attempted to ſhew, is that ſome of the Propheſies referr'd to by Chriſt or his Apoſtles, related to other Perſons, and

other

other Events, and not to him. It will, I ſuppoſe, be ſaid, that this is ſufficient. For Chriſt and his Apoſtles having appeal'd to theſe Paſſages of the *Jewiſh* Scriptures as Proofs of his being the *Meſſiah*, their Credit depends on the Validity of theſe Allegations: And if they are found to falſify, or even miſtake in them, they cannot be thoſe inſpired Perſons we take them for, and muſt upon the whole be conſider'd as Impoſtors. This I think is the full Force of this Objection; and 'tis confeſs'd, that the Inſpiration of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, is a fundamental Point in this Queſtion. But before this Objection can conclude againſt it, it muſt be clearly proved.

1ſt. THAT the Paſſages on which it is founded, were really appeal'd to by Chriſt, or his Apoſtles, as Proofs of his being the *Meſſiah*. And then,

2ly. THAT they are not good Proofs of it. That Chriſt or his Apoſtles might apply many Sayings and Expreſſions occurring in the Law and the Prophets, only

only by way of Illuſtration, or Accommodation, is a very poſſible Suppoſition; becauſe 'tis a way of Writing and Speaking which has at all Times been uſed. Such Applications as theſe are not intended as Proofs, and therefore 'tis frivolous, from their not proving, to infer any Thing againſt the Credit, Skill, or Inſpiration of thoſe who make them. And where any Paſſage, apply'd by Chriſt or his Apoſtles, will *poſſibly* bear this Suppoſition, it ought to be admitted; becauſe where we have the beſt direct Proof of any Perſon's Inſpiration that in the Nature of the Thing can be given, (and ſuch Miracles certainly are) Reaſon will not permit us to give up ſuch Evidence to any Objection, which admits but a *poſſible* Solution. But ſuppoſe there is no Room for this Solution; That the Paſſage in Objection was plainly appeal'd to as a Proof that *Jeſus* was the *Meſſiah*, and yet does not prove it: Yet if there be any Probability, that 'twas an Argument upon the Conceſſions of the *Jews*, it might be very proper for their Conviction, and

ſuch

ſuch as an honeſt, a reaſonable, and, I will add, an inſpired Man might apply, without any Impeachment of his Veracity, Senſe, or Inſpiration. This is a Way of arguing, which has ever been allow'd; and why Chriſt and his Apoſtles ſhould be debarr'd from it, no Reaſon can be given. That this Suppoſition is not only poſſible but very probable, will appear, when we conſider that the *Jewiſh* Nation, for ſome Time before the Appearance of *Jeſus Chriſt*, had ſtrong Expectations of their Meſſiah. Under ſuch a Perſuaſion it may well be ſuppoſed, that the Learned among them had with more than ordinary Attention ſearch'd the prophetick Writings for the Marks and Deſignations of him, and might probably apprehend him to be delineated in ſome Paſſages, which had no Relation to him. If we conſider the Obſcurity of Propheſies before their Completion; How apt a Man, who reads ſuch Writings with an Intention on one Point, would be to fancy a Relation to it, and with what Fondneſs he would entertain any Appearance of ſo reputa-

ble

ble a Diſcovery, it can ſcarce be imagin'd but Inſtances of this Kind muſt have happen'd: And the ſame Reaſons, together with the Character of the Doctor, would eaſily recommend it to general Perſuaſion. Now Chriſt and his Apoſtles might juſtly argue with them upon theſe Preſumptions, however they were miſtaken in them. Whatever they were in themſelves, they were Proofs to them, and might ſucceſsfully be urged for their Conviction. Unleſs indeed, we ſuppoſe Chriſt and his Apoſtles the weakeſt Men that ever lived, we cannot imagine they would argue with the *Jews*, upon ſuch Principles as they were either known to deny, or if they would but barely deny, the Argument was at an End. Suppoſing then, not granting, that any of the Paſſages referr'd to by Chriſt or his Apoſtles, in Aſſertion of the Character he took upon him, do not prove it; yet we ſee, that by a Suppoſition not only poſſible but probable, and ſupported by ſtrong Preſumptions of Fact, the Application becomes reaſonable and proper, and conſequen tl

ſequently very conſiſtent with the Inſpiration of thoſe who made it.

WELL, but if we have no Evidence from the Predictions of the *Jewiſh* Revelation, which atteſts *Jeſus* to be *that Prophet* who ſhou'd come, independently on the Conceſſions of the *Jews*; then there is in Reality no Proof of that Concluſion; for 'tis confeſs'd that Miracles, without a concurring Teſtimony from the Propheſies, are not a ſufficient Evidence of his being *That Prophet*.

WE admit it; and therefore tho' we obſerve, that every Allegation which the * Writer in our View has objected to, might be defended from all his Inferences upon the preceding Suppoſitions, which 'tis impoſſible for him to diſprove, yet we acknowledge that the Nature of the Concluſion in Queſtion requires ſome real Proof of this Kind. And ſuch we are at Liberty to inſiſt on, notwithſtanding any Thing he has offer'd

* *Grounds and Reaſons*, &c.

to

to the contrary. For has he examin'd all the *Jewiſh* Propheſies which, we affirm, related to the *Meſſiah*, and were fulfill'd in *Jeſus Chriſt?* Far from it. And therefore ſhould we give up the Allegations he has examin'd, as Arguments only upon the Conceſſion of the *Jews*, yet ſtill there may be real Proof enough in others to ſupport our Concluſion. But we give up none, and hope to ſhew that every Allegation of Chriſt or his Apoſtles, and even thoſe he has conſider'd, affords ſuch inconteſtable Proof of our Concluſion, as over-rules all his Objections againſt them.

But firſt I would ask, Are there in the *Jewiſh* Writings, any Propheſies relating to the *Meſſiah*, or not? If there are none, how came it to paſs that ſo confident, ſo univerſal an Expectation of ſuch a Perſon prevail'd among that People? If there are any more certain and determinate in their Relation than theſe, let them be produced, and let the Pretenſions of our Lord be examin'd by them. If there are none more determinate

minate than theſe, then we muſt conclude, that the *Jews* ſaw enough in theſe, for the Ground of that moſt firm and general Expectation. The Relation muſt have appear'd very clearly and indubitably to them, tho' 'tis eaſy to imagine, that when ſo much of the *Jewiſh* Writings and Traditions are loſt, the Lights which aſcertain'd it to them, may not appear to us.

BUT to bring this Argument to a ſhort, and, I think, a deciſive Iſſue; ſhou'd we admit that the *Jews* ſaw theſe Scriptures in no other Light than appears to us now, (more than this cannot be deſir'd, nor can ſo much be demanded) yet we contend, that the Application of them by Chriſt and his Apoſtles was attended with ſuch irreſiſtable Proof of its Fidelity, as muſt overbear all Scruples and Objections againſt it. For let us ſuppoſe a *Jew* in in our Saviour's Time had objected to any of his Allegations of the antient Propheſies, all that our *Free-Thinker* has ſuggeſted. The Point in Queſtion be-

between Chriſt and him, muſt have been, —— Whether the Prophet in ſuch Paſſage had any View to the *Meſſiah*, or nor. For 'tis not pretended, that there is any Propheſy of the *Meſſiah* which cannot be apply'd to Chriſt; Nor is a ſufficient Correſpondence deny'd between the Places cited, and the Circumſtances or Events of Chriſt's Life: But the Diſpute is, whether thoſe Paſſages had, in their firſt Intention, any relation to the *Meſſiah*. Now, could any Argument in the Nature of the thing, be more deciſive of this Queſtion, than the Teſtimony of God? And could the Teſtimony of God appear by any ſtronger Evidence, than the Power of Miracles ſupporting the Allegation? God certainly knew the Intention of every Propheſy deliver'd from his Spirit; and when the Perſon who apply'd this Propheſy to the *Meſſiah*, gave the beſt Proof which poſſibly can be given, that he was ſent by God, and acted and ſpake by his Commiſſion, God himſelf muſt be underſtood to affirm his Application. The Authority of the Expoſition muſt, in ſuch

ſuch a Caſe, be equal to that of the Propheſy; for there cou'd not be better Proof that the Prophet was ſent by God, than the Expoſitor gave of his Miſſion: And there muſt be altogether as good Reaſon to aſſent to One, as to the Other. To perſuade us therefore to ſet aſide Miracles in this Debate, is to perſuade us to ſet aſide the moſt deciſive Evidence, that the Nature of the Queſtion admits of, and which no Objection but a manifeſt Impoſſibility can render inconcluſive. For if it be but *poſſible* that theſe Paſſages might relate to the *Meſſiah*, the Affirmation of a Perſon whoſe Miſſion from God is atteſted by Miracles, ought to aſſure us they did ſo. I ſhall obſerve only farther on this Head, that the Diſtance of Time at which we now conſider this Argument, gives no Advantage to the Objection, nor takes away any from the Anſwer; becauſe we have at this time as good Evidence for the Miracles, as we have for the Propheſies; or the Tradition of the Miracles is as well derived down to us, as the Tradition of the Propheſies.

UPON the whole I hope it has appear'd, that the Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles are in general a proper Evidence of the Chriſtian Revelation; and, in Concurrence with ſuch other Proofs, as by plain Conſequence follow from them, of that particular Concluſion of our Faith, that *Jeſus Chriſt* was the *Meſſiah* promiſed to the *Jews*. And therefore our Lord might juſtly appeal to the *Works he did, as bearing Witneſs of him.* I have conſider'd a late Objection, which pretends to ſuperſede this Proof, and have endeavour'd to ſhew it inſufficient; And that the Concluſions which neceſſarily ariſe from our Lord's and his Apoſtles Miracles, do themſelves diſcharge this Objection, and ſolve all the Difficulties it pretends to ſuggeſt.

ALL that remains to give this Argument its full Force, is an Inquiry of Fact, — Whether ſuch Miracles were wrought, or not. And if we have as good Evidence of Theſe, as we have of any other ancient Facts, or as it can be ex-

expected we ſhould have, ſuppoſing them to have been perform'd, we have all the Evidence that a reaſonable Inquirer ought to inſiſt on. And if the Facts are allow'd, the Concluſions they ſuggeſt, are as certain to us, as they were to thoſe who ſaw them perform'd. Our Belief, indeed, ſtands aſſured in our holy Religion by ſeveral concurrent Proofs of great Force; But I look upon this from Miracles as the chief Foundation of our Faith; a Proof equally adapted to the Conviction of all Capacities, and which cannot be ſet aſide without weakening all the reſt. To which therefore we ought firmly to adhere; reſolutely to defend a Station of ſo much Strength and Advantage to our Cauſe; and not ſuffer ourſelves to be cheated out of it, by the Sophiſtry of *thoſe, who lie in wait to deceive* *.

* Epheſ. iv. 14.

SERMON VI.

JOHN X. XXV.

The Works that I do in my Father's Name, bear Witneſs of me.

IN my preceding Reflections on this Subject, I inquired how far Miracles are in their Nature a concluſive Evidence of a divine Revelation; and what Objections or Defects are a Bar to this Proof: And obſerved in particular, that no ſuch Objection either barr'd, or poſtponed our Attention to this Evidence, as alledged for the Goſpel. We are therefore now

at Liberty to go on, and examine the Allegation its ſelf. And if we have all the Proof that the Nature of the Subject admits, that Jeſus Chriſt and his Apoſtles really perform'd Miracles in Atteſtation of their divine Miſſion, we cannot refuſe the Evidence they give to the Chriſtian Revelation.

Now if there be any Defect in the Aſſertion of this Argument, it muſt ariſe from one of theſe Suggeſtions, either

Iſt. We have not ſufficient Aſſurance, that the Facts reported of Chriſt and his Apoſtles were really Miracles. Or,

IIly. We have not ſufficient Reaſon to credit the Reports themſelves.

By *Miracles*, I underſtand ſenſible Effects of the ſpecial, and extraordinary Power of God. Every Action indeed which apparently exceeds the Power of the Agent who performs it, may in a general Senſe be call'd a Miracle; but unleſs it appears, from the Nature or Circumſtances

cumſtances of it, to be wrought by God, it cannot be an Evidence of a divine Revelation. That we may not go back again into internal Objections, I will ſuppoſe, till the contrary is ſhewn in ſome Inſtance, that there is no Fact reported of Chriſt or his Apoſtles, which exceeds the Power of God to perform. And it will appear from the Facts themſelves that they are ſuch, at leaſt ſome of them ſuch, as muſt have been perform'd either by the extraordinary Interpoſition of God, or by the Aſſiſtance of ſome other intelligent Agent of ſuperior Power to Man. That the Miracles of Chriſt and his Apoſtles were not wrought by the Aſſiſtance of evil Spirits, I think the Doctrines which they atteſt, are a ſufficient Proof. It could ſerve no Intereſt of malitious wicked Spirits, to give Credit to ſo pure, ſo rational a Morality, ſo conducive to the private and ſocial Happineſs of Mankind; and to ſo holy, and ſpiritual a Worſhip of the Deity. A Religion, which recall'd the World from the Adoration of Demons; which taught Men to abhor their Worſhip,

and profeſs the utmoſt Enmity and Deteſtation of them. And ſince the Doctrines and the Miracles muſt be referr'd to the ſame Author, if 'tis incredible that the Doctrine ſhou'd proceed from Devils, it muſt be equally incredible, that the Miracles ſhou'd be wrought by their Power. And if they were wrought by good Spirits, they muſt have acted under the Direction of God, and conſequently their Power was his.

But I preſume, we need not be much ſollicitous to defend our Lord's Miracles from this Suggeſtion, which ſuppoſes an Acknowledgment of Angels and Spirits. From our preſent Adverſaries, we may rather expect to be told, that neither God nor Devil had any thing to do with them; but they were wrought purely by the Sleight, the Skill, or the Confederacy of Men. But we hope this Imputation will appear refuted, by the Nature and Circumſtances of the Facts reported. Many of them are ſuch, as manifeſtly exceed all human Power; were

were perform'd in publick Concourſes of the People; had ſeveral Thouſands of Witneſſes, and were in their Circumſtances capable of ſuch Trial and Examination, as no Impoſture can be imagin'd to eſcape, or elude. The giving Sight, for inſtance, to a Man * born blind, without any other Application than waſhing in common Water, is an Operation which no human Skill can account for; neither can it admit any probable Suſpition of Impoſture. The Fact was † examin'd with the ſtricteſt Inquiſition, and very unwillingly acknowledg'd, by thoſe who would gladly have diſcover'd the leaſt Colour of Objection to it. The Perſon muſt have been known to great Numbers from his Infancy, many Years before our Lord took upon him any publick Character: And therefore 'tis unimaginable, that he and his Parents ſhould have acted in concert with Chriſt, and pretended this Blindneſs, to give him the Reputation of curing it. Neither was it poſſible for the Man to

* John ix. † V. 15, &c.

pretend

pretend to ſee, when he did not: This muſt have been ſo ſilly, ſo diſcoverable a Cheat, that it could not have obtain'd Credit for a Day. Equally unaccountable from any human Power and Colluſion, is the reſtoring the impotent Man at the Pool of * *Bethesda*. The Cure was perform'd, without any other outward Means than a bare Word ſpoken. It was attended by a Crowd of Witneſſes, † *a Multitude being in the Place.* And the Perſon had labour'd under the Infirmity *thirty and eight Years*, long before our Lord was born. Many other of the Miracles which atteſt the Goſpel, are equally acquitted from theſe Suggeſtions. I will mention only One more, the wonderful Gift of Tongues to the Eleven at Pentecoſt, a Time when *Jeruſalem* was even thronged by a Concourſe from various Nations. Was it poſſible, think you, that Perſons of their low Education, ſhould really acquire ſo many different Languages by any Induſtry or Application of their

* John v. † V. 13, 14.

own,

own, even tho' they had attended to nothing elſe, from the firſt Day their Maſter call'd them? Or can we imagine they ſhould be able to concert this Appearance with ſuch a Diverſity of Strangers, from Countries where they had no Correſpondence; and that not only with a few, but with all and every one, of each Nation then preſent? And yet theſe moral Impoſſibilities muſt appear practicable, before we can ſuſpect any Impoſture in this Miracle. If therefore we allow the Facts as reported, ſince they are manifeſtly beyond human Abilities, and there is no juſt Suſpition either of the Aſſiſtance of evil Spirits, or the Colluſion of Men, we muſt acknowledge the Finger of God in them.

The Reſult then of the Argument reſts on an Inquiry of Fact, antient Fact; which, in the Nature of the Thing, is capable of no other Proof but Teſtimony. And if we have the beſt Evidence that Teſtimony can give to ſuch Facts, if we have as much as could be expected, ſuppoſing them to have been perform'd;

form'd; if no antient Facts are better atteſted, no Teſtimonies better ſupported than theſe, we have all the Proof that any equitable Man can deſire; and he muſt act againſt Reaſon, who refuſes his Aſſent to it.

That the Scriptures, in which theſe Facts are related, were written by the Perſons whoſe Names they bear; and that they are tranſmitted to us without any material Alteration, any that can affect the Credibility of theſe Reports, we have more and better Evidence than for any other Book in the World. If therefore theſe Reports are incredible, it muſt be for one of theſe Reaſons; Either there is juſt Suſpition that theſe Relaters were deceived themſelves; or that they intended to deceive the reſt of the World, which is the Second Point I propoſed to clear. And

1ſt, We have the greateſt Reaſon to believe, theſe Relaters were not deceiv'd themſelves. They tell us, that † *what*

† Ep. *of* Joh. i.

their

their Eyes ſaw, and their Hands handled, that declare they unto us. They were Witneſſes not of one or two only, but of a vaſt Number of our Lord's Miracles; many more than they have tranſmitted to us: And had all imaginable Opportunities of examining the Reality of them. They attended their Maſter in all his Privacies; and if he had acted in Confederacy with any, they muſt either themſelves have been the Perſons, or muſt unavoidably have diſcover'd His Correſpondencies: And if they had detected Him of Impoſture in one Inſtance, they might reaſonably have concluded the ſame of all others. And in that great Miracle, our Lord's Reſurrection, they tell us, They were very incredulous, and look'd upon the firſt Reports of it as * *idle Tales.* That when it was yet farther confirm'd, ſeveral † *believ'd it not.* And One of them, who took upon him to think more freely than the reſt, declared, That unleſs he ſaw the very ſame wounded Body which had ſuffer'd, and ‖ *put his*

* Luk. xxiv. 11. † Mar. xvi. 13. ‖ Joh. x 25.

Fingers

Fingers into the Print of the Nails, and thruſt his Hand into his Side, he would not believe. This ſenſible inconteſtable Proof was given them, and they profeſs themſelves aſſured with the fulleſt Conviction, that the Body they ſaw, and handled, was the ſame they had before converſed with; the ſame Fleſh and Bones they took down from the Croſs, embalm'd, and buried. If we can ſuppoſe Men deceived in ſuch Evidences as theſe, we cannot depend on the Reality of any Perceptions. But they were farther confirmed in their Belief of their Lord's Miracles, by finding the ſame Power, according to His Promiſe, communicated to themſelves. And how poſſible ſoever we might imagine it, for them to be impoſed on by their Maſter, they could not impoſe on themſelves. They muſt be conſcious to their own Fraud or Honeſty, and muſt know with certainty, whether the Miracles they wrought in their own Perſons were real or not. There cannot therefore be any Suſpition, that they were impoſed on themſelves. All that can be doubted

ed is, whether they acted faithfully, and did not intend to deceive the World in these Relations.

Now, before we can reasonably entertain so hard a Suspition of any Persons, we should be able to assign some Motive, that might induce them to it. If the Apostles of our Lord, the original Witnesses of these Facts, and some of them the Authors of those Histories which report them, proposed any temporal Advantages in this Design on the World, they were miserably deceiv'd in the Event: For Scorn, Poverty, and Persecution attended them where-ever they went. They left their Friends and Country, and, after all the Varieties of Misery and Distress that Men could be exposed to, they chearfully gave up their Lives, even on Racks and Crosses, in Confirmation of their Report. And is it imaginable, that so many Persons should thus resolutely persist, in asserting what they knew to be false? That they should endure all that can be terrible and afflictive to human Nature, merely for the

the Sport of impoſing on the Credulity of a few Converts? And that not one of all the Number ſhould ever be prevail'd on, either by Intereſt, Honeſty, or Fear, to impeach the Cheat, and diſcover an unprofitable, perſecuted Impoſture?

It may perhaps be ſaid, that Vanity is a ſtrong Paſſion; and the Ambition of being Authors of a new Religion to the World, is a Motive that may account for all this. No doubt theſe Paſſions, when rais'd to their utmoſt Height, are able to carry Men into as great Extravagances as any other. But ſuch Exceſſes of Vanity are very uncommon, and rarely found in ſingle Examples: Neither can any Thing be more incredible, than that this Spirit ſhould poſſeſs ſuch a Number of Men in ſo equal, ſo uniform, ſo invincible a Degree of Obſtinacy, as appeared in every one of the Apoſtles. And when we obſerve the Characters of the Perſons, we muſt ſurely even hence acquit them of ſo improbable a Suggeſtion. They were

were poor, illiterate Men; of low Education and Employments; bred in a Way of Life, which render'd them the leaſt apt to entertain, and the leaſt qualify'd to execute ſo great a Project. But ſuppoſing them all of the moſt active enterpriſing Genius; yet can we imagine Perſons of their mean Rank in Life, capable of digeſting, and concerting ſuch a Deſign, in ſuch exact Harmony and Conſiſtency with each other? That they ſhould all, ſeparated in diſtant Countries, agree in the ſame Relations, propoſe the ſame Syſtem of Doctrines, and every one act his Part with ſuch Firmneſs and Conſtancy, as not even to be tortured into a Departure from his Profeſſions? Such were the Apoſtles of Chriſt, the Relaters and Witneſſes of His Miracles, and ſuch their Conduct. Now, I ſay, that Perſons of this Character, void of Learning, and all thoſe acquired Accompliſhments, which might be ſuſpected to infuſe an Ambition of becoming Teachers of the World, ſhould engage in ſo vaſt a Deſign, as changing the Religion of all Nations on the Earth;

That they ſhould carry it on with ſuc unmoveable Patience and Reſolution, againſt the fierceſt Oppoſition of all the Powers of the World, and all unanimouſly perſiſt in it, even to Death; can be imputed to no Principle, but a firm Conviction of the Truth of what they aſſerted; a Conſcience of Duty towards God, and the Expectation, they profeſs'd, of being rewarded by him in another Life. Theſe are Circumſtances which put their Fidelity beyond all reaſonable, I think, beyond all poſſible Queſtion; ſuch Proofs of Honeſty, as no Hiſtorian beſides themſelves ever gave. We may alſo add, in Confirmation of their Report, that many Particulars of it are atteſted both by Heathen, and *Jewiſh* Writers: And ſome of the earlieſt Oppoſers of Chriſtianity, of whom we have any Remains, acknowledge the Fact, that our Lord wrought Miracles. It may be farther obſerved, that the ſame miraculous Powers which are reported of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, were tranſmitted to their Succeſſours, and continued for ſome Ages in the Church. A Fact

ſo

ſo notorious that * *Tertullian*, ſo late as the End of the ſecond or Beginning of the third Century, appeals to it in a publick Apology, and gives a ſolemn Challenge to his Heathen Adverſaries, to put the Queſtion between them upon this Iſſue. No reaſonable Man can imagine, that a Perſon of Learning and Character, would have expoſed himſelf and his Cauſe to the Shame of ſo eaſy a Refutation, as muſt have attended it, if the Facts had not been known and inconteſtable. Now ſuppoſe, if common Senſe will ſuffer us to ſuppoſe it, that the Apoſtles and Writers of the Goſpel, had agreed to report of their Lord and themſelves falſe Facts, or counterfeit Miracles; Could they tranſmit the ſame Art, or the ſame Inſincerity to others, to many Thouſands, in a long Succeſſion after their Death? Can it be believed, that none ſhould reveal the mighty Secret, and diſcover the Application made to him to carry on the Intrigue? They went on, it ſeems, from Age to Age, handing down the Art of Jugling, and impoſing fictiti-

* *Apolog. pag.* 22. *Ed. Par.* 1675. & *ad Scap. pag.* 69.

ous Miracles on the World; and not one, of all the Multitude that muſt have been intruſted, could be prevail'd on, by all the Diſcouragements that Malice and Power could put them under, to betray his Confidence, and own the Impoſture. Sure ſuch Improbabilities need no Refutation. And if Miracles were really wrought in the Chriſtian Church, after the Death of the Apoſtles, by thoſe who ſucceeded in their Commiſſion and Doctrine, then the Evidence is plainly carry'd on; and God in theſe Miracles bore Witneſs, both to the Doctrine of Chriſt, and his Apoſtles, and to the Miracles related of them.

In ſum then, if there appears no probable Suſpition, that the Hiſtorians of the Goſpel were deceiv'd themſelves, or acted inſincerely, and with an Intention to deceive the World, but all the Evidence of the contrary that the Nature of the Thing admits, their Relations have all the Credibility that any Hiſtory can have; more, indeed, than any other Hiſtory in the World can pretend to:

to: And conſequently if we refuſe our Aſſent to theſe Relations, we muſt reject the Credit of all Hiſtory, and believe nothing that was done before we were born, or which we did not actually ſee with our own Eyes: An Abſurdity, to which if our Adverſaries will be content to be driven, we need not, I think, trouble ourſelves to follow them any farther.

And if theſe Hiſtories are true, the Miracles they report were actually perform'd. And if we can have no Suſpition of Impoſture in them, we muſt acknowledge them to have been wrought by the Power of God. And if they were wrought by God, then the Doctrine they atteſt muſt be the Doctrine of God. For 'tis a Contradiction to the Goodneſs, Juſtice, and Veracity of God, to ſuppoſe he could give the Teſtimony of his Power, to any Doctrine but what he approved, and required to be believ'd upon his Authority.

THUS then the Argument from Miracles ſtands. If there be any juſt internal Objection to the Doctrine they atteſt; if it be ſuch as cannot conſiſt with the Attributes of the divine Idea; if it contradicts any manifeſt Truth, natural or moral, no Appearance of Miracles can convince us, that ſuch Doctrine is a divine Revelation; becauſe we are ſure God cannot affirm a manifeſt Falſhood. And, for the ſame Reaſon, if 'tis irreconcileable to a precedent Revelation, we cannot believe it to be from God, becauſe God cannot contradict Himſelf. Either of theſe Objections, if clear and evident, muſt neceſſarily overweigh any Appearance of Miracles; becauſe the Suppoſition of God's affirming ſuch Doctrines is ſimply impoſſible, and implies a Contradiction. But in all Appearances of Miracles, how highly *probable* ſoever, there is yet a *Poſſibility* of our being deceived: And 'tis more reaſonable for us to believe we are deceiv'd, even where there is but a bare Poſſibility that we may be, than to believe

lieve that God can affirm a Falſhood, which is impoſſible. But where there is no ſuch internal Objection againſt the Doctrine, and we have as full Satisfaction in the Reality of the Miracles as the Nature of the Subject admits, we are obliged, upon their Atteſtation, to receive the Doctrine as a divine Revelation; becauſe we have in that Caſe the utmoſt Evidence that can be given us of a divine Revelation.

And ſince, as I have ſhewn, there lies no ſuch internal Objection againſt the Doctrine of the Goſpel; and there is as good Proof as the Subject is capable of, that the Miracles reported in it were really wrought; I may reſume my Concluſion againſt the *Deiſt*, —— That we have all the Proof that any reaſonable Man can expect, or require, that the Goſpel is a divine Revelation: The utmoſt, indeed, that could have been given us, ſuppoſing it to have been from God.

BUT I am concern'd to obviate an Objection, which I apprehend from another Quarter. —— That, by this way of arguing, I make the Grounds of our Belief of the Chriſtian Revelation to be but *probable*, and not abſolutely *infallible*. I confeſs I do ſo; and think the Nature of the Subject capable of no higher Evidence. But what is ſo highly probable, demands the Aſſent of every reaſonable Man. But then, I ſay farther, that he who upon this, tho' but *probable*, Evidence, admits the Revelation, muſt afterwards acknowledge an *infallible* Authority in that Revelation.

TO clear this, let us ſuppoſe a Perſon in our Saviour's Time had not ſeen his Miracles, but believed them on the Report of ſome credible Friends, and, in Conſequence of them, had acknowledg'd his divine Miſſion, as he very reaſonably might do. It is plain, the Foundation of his Faith would have been but *probable*, the Teſtimony of fallible Men, and

and ſuch, as if, when he came to hear our Lord's Doctrine, he had found Him affirm a manifeſt Falſhood, muſt have been over-weigh'd. But if no ſuch Objection appear'd againſt his Doctrine, the Evidence of his Miracles, tho' but *probable*, was ſufficient to convince him of his Miſſion from God, and conſequently of his *infallible* Authority.

Suppose, in another Inſtance, — I am in general convinced of the Chriſtian Revelation, and that the Scriptures in which it is contain'd are infallibly true. — I find in theſe Scriptures a Paſſage, whoſe Meaning I do not underſtand. — I conſult, as in Reaſon I ſhould do, ſome Perſon more knowing than myſelf. If my Guide gives me a manifeſtly falſe Propoſition as the Senſe of that Scripture, I cannot, upon his or any Authority, admit this to be the Senſe of Words, which I acknowledge to be a divine Revelation. If this be really the Senſe of thoſe Words, I muſt retract my Belief of their divine Au-

Authority; and if I believe their divine Authority, I muſt reject this Interpretation of them. But if no ſuch Objection ariſes againſt his Expoſition, and the Conſtruction of the Words will bear it, I may reaſonably, upon his Authority, admit it as the Senſe of that Scripture. The Evidence I have that this is the Senſe of it, is but probable, the Judgment of a fallible Man: But when, upon this probable Evidence, I receive the Propoſition he aſſigns, as the Senſe of that Scripture, I believe that Propoſition, not as affirm'd by him, but as affirm'd by the infallible Authority of God.

THUS it is in the Aſſent we give to the Chriſtian Revelation, upon the Evidence of the Miracles which atteſt it. The Ground of our Aſſurance that ſuch Miracles were wrought, is but probable. The Credibility of the Relaters, and even the Tradition of the Books in which they are recorded, is no more than probable; and would be overballanced by any manifeſt Falſhood in the Doc-

Doctrine of the Goſpel. But ſince the Doctrine is free from any ſuch Objection, and we have more and better Evidence for the Fidelity of the Goſpel-Hiſtorians, and the Tradition of their Books, than appears for any other Books or Hiſtorians; we muſt act unreaſonably if we deny, or even doubt, theſe Reports. So high a Probability demands a certain Aſſent. We every Day believe upon leſs, and he would juſtly be eſteem'd a Madman, who ſhould refuſe to do ſo. But when upon this Evidence, tho' but *probable*, we believe the Miracles, and conſequently the Revelation which they atteſt, we then believe the Contents of that Revelation with divine Faith, as *infallibly* true becauſe affirm'd by God.

It is therefore a vain Fallacy, by which the Emiſſaries of the Church of *Rome* ſometimes puzzle weak or confuſed Underſtandings; — That unleſs we admit the Infallibility of the Church, we have no infallible Grounds for any Article of our Faith: Becauſe, as we have

ſeen,

ſeen, a probable Evidence may lead us to the Acknowledgment of an infallible Authority. We receive the Books of Scripture as written by the Authors whoſe Names they bear, and believe the Fidelity of the Relations they contain, upon the ſame Kind of Evidence on which we receive the Books, and credit the Relations of *Livy* or *Tacitus*; tho', we preſume, we have ſtronger and better Evidence of this kind for the Books and Relations of Scripture, than for the other. The concurrent Tradition of the univerſal Church, is a very high Degree of Evidence of this Kind, and the very beſt we have; becauſe it extends to all Parts of Scripture: But ſtill 'tis in its Nature only probable. And to convince any one of this, I need only obſerve, that a like Concurrence of Teſtimony, from the Enemies of the Chriſtian Religion, confirming any Relation of Scripture, is in its Nature ſtronger Evidence than this; for the ſame Reaſons that the Concurrence of an Author, who profeſſedly wrote againſt any Hiſtorian, would more ſtrongly confirm any Relation

lation in him, than the Concurrence of one who was known to favour him, and may be ſuſpected to copy after him.

THE Confirmation indeed which the Goſpel-Writings receive from the Teſtimony of Enemies, reaches but to few Parts of them; and therefore upon the whole we receive them infinitely leſs upon this Evidence, than the Teſtimony of the Church: But ſtill I contend, that ſo far as This reaches, 'tis in its Nature ſtronger Evidence. And if this Evidence is in its Nature only probable, it can with no Reaſon be pretended that the other is more than probable. But ſo probable it is, that no Man acting rationally can reſiſt its Force. Whereas the Romaniſts Way of proving the Authority of Scripture from the Infallibility of their Church, can never convince any Man, who is diſpoſed to deny it. And 'tis certain, an Argument which will not do that, is good for nothing. For how is this Infallibility of their Church to be proved? Why by

by Scripture. So that the Authority of Scripture is to be proved by the Infallibility of the Church; and the Infallibility of the Church by the Authority of Scripture. Which is juſt as good a Proof, as a Mahometan might give for the *Alchoran.* ——— I believe the *Alchoran* to be true, becauſe the *Mufti*, who is infallible, affirms it to be ſo; and I believe the *Mufti* to be infallible, becauſe the *Alchoran* ſays he is ſo. Only this Advantage the Mahometan may have in his Argument, that he might, for what I know, produce an Affirmation of the *Mufti*'s Infallibility in the *Alchoran*; but the Church of *Rome* will never be able to ſhew her Infallibility affirm'd in the Chriſtian Scriptures. They may delight themſelves, and amuſe their Converts with this Dance in a Circle, if they pleaſe; but they muſt excuſe us, if we chooſe rather to ground our Belief of the Scriptures, and of the Divine Revelation contain'd in them, on ſuch rational Proofs, as may enable us to *reſiſt Gainſayers, and give an Anſwer, to any Man who ask-*

asketh us a Reaſon, of the Hope that is in us.

THAT we have ſuch rational Proof of the Chriſtian Revelation, I have endeavour'd to ſhew. — That no Objection appears againſt the Matter of it, which can bear the Evidence of the Miracles which atteſt it; —— That we have all the Proof that theſe Miracles were really perform'd, which the Nature of the Subject requires, or admits that we have no reaſonable Suſpition that the Relaters were deceiv'd themſelves, or intended to deceive us; —— That we have better Aſſurance of the Fidelity of their Reports, than for any other antient Hiſtory. Theſe we think as full Evidence of the Facts related, as any rational Man can inſiſt on, and we deſire no more. And if the Facts are allow'd, they are ſuch as prove the Divine Authority of thoſe who perform'd them, and, conſequently, of the Revelation, in Confirmation of which they were perform'd.

OUR

Our Faith, as I obſerv'd, is aſſured in the Goſpel-Revelation, by the concurrent Support of ſeveral other Proofs of great Force. Such is the ſwift and wonderful Propagation of Chriſtianity, by Inſtruments in their natural Powers weak and contemptible, not only without the Aſſiſtance, but againſt the moſt enraged Oppoſition of ſecular Power. And ſuch eſpecially is the exact Completion of our Lord's Propheſy, in ſuch a Deſtruction of the Country, and ſuch an utter Diſſipation of the People of the *Jews*, as no human Sagacity can be imagin'd to foreſee, and which never had an Example in any other Nation under Heaven.

But the Evidence I undertook to conſider, was that ariſing from the Miracles wrought in Atteſtation of the Goſpel. A Subject indeed of too great Extent, to be fully treated in a Diſcourſe of this Nature. But I hope, what I have offer'd, is ſufficient to remove all material Objections, and lead any equitable Man, to

to the Acknowledgment made to our Saviour, * *Rabbi, thou art a Teacher come from God, for no Man could do the Miracles that thou doſt, except God was with him.*

* John iii. 2.

SERMON VII.

JOHN III. xix.

This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were Evil.

WE have hitherto treated the Adverſaries of Chriſtianity as Men pretending to Reaſon, and ſeriouſly diſſatisfy'd with the Proofs of its divine Authority; and have endeavour'd their Conviction under that Appearance.

But if the Scripture before us has given us the true Account of Infidelity, we muſt now take leave to conſider them in a different Character, as wicked immoral Men, prejudiced by their Vices againſt the Acknowledgment of Truth. For thus our Lord tells us, that his Goſpel had all the Evidence of *a Light* from Heaven that could be required; but this Light made Diſcoveries unacceptable to the Paſſions of Men; and therefore they ſhut their Eyes againſt it. *They loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were Evil.* To us, the Affirmation of our Divine Maſter, who * *knew what was in Man,* is a full Aſſurance that this is really the Caſe: But thoſe who are Infidels to his Authority, we may expect to reſent this as a partial invidious Suggeſtion, and demand our Proof of it.

Now, in this Argument, demonſtrative Proof is not to be required. The Secrets of Mens Hearts, and the Mo-

* John ii. 25.

tives they act upon, can be collected only from probable Preſumptions: And if there appear in this Caſe, the ſtrongeſt Preſumptions that Mens Oppoſition to the Goſpel, proceeds from the Contrariety of its Doctrines to their Luſts and Paſſions, we have all the Proof that the Nature of the Thing admits.

THE Poſition of our Lord, *That Light is come into the World*, we have endeavour'd to aſſert; and, upon an attentive Examination, can diſcover no Defect in the Evidence of the Goſpel; but find it as fully proved, as any reaſonable Man can require a divine Revelation ſhould be. Hence therefore ariſes a juſt Suſpition, at leaſt, that want of Evidence is not the true Cauſe of Mens Oppoſition to it. And if it farther appears,

Iſt. THAT the Cauſe here aſſign'd, an Attachment to vitious and immoral Intereſts, is every way proportion'd to this Effect; if it be found, in other Inſtances, to ſuppreſs the Evidence of the cleareſt Truth,

and over-rule the Convictions of Reaſon: And,

II. If the Luſts and Paſſions of Men are more concern'd to oppoſe the Acknowledgment of the Goſpel, than any other Concluſion, we have all the Proof that can be deſired, that our Lord has here aſcribed the Infidelity of Men to its true Principle. And having under theſe Heads ſupported the Charge, I ſhall then,

III. Assert the Juſtice of the Condemnation here pronounced, on thoſe who reject the Goſpel.

I. Let us inquire whether the Cauſe here aſſign'd to Infidelity, an Attachment to vitious and immoral Intereſts, be not proportion'd to it: Whether it be not, in other Inſtances, found to ſuppreſs the Evidence of Truth, and overrule the Convictions of Reaſon.

THE two general Objects of human Purſuits, are Truth and Happineſs; but the Influence of the latter far exceeds that of the former. The firſt and governing Paſſion of the Soul, is a Deſire of Happineſs; and the Love of Truth is only ſubordinate to it. And agreeably, we never find Men much concern'd about the Truth or Falſhood of a Propoſition, merely becauſe 'tis true or falſe, but becauſe their Intereſt appears to be, ſome Way or other, affected by it. 'Tis this Motive engages their Attention; and, according to the real or imaginary Importance of the Intereſt in their View, and its Dependence on the Queſtion before them, the Warmth of the Conteſt riſes higher, the Prejudices of thoſe who are miſtaken appear ſtronger, and their Conviction becomes more difficult. Every Diſpute we inquire into, every Book we read, and every Man we converſe with, will, in ſome Inſtance or other, confirm to us the Truth of this Reflection. Take the moſt exact Reaſoner on in-

different Subjects, one who can accurately diſtinguiſh true from falſe, and judge preciſely of the ſeveral Degrees of Evidence and Uncertainty; and let a Queſtion be propoſed to him in which he has a near Intereſt concern'd; the Clearneſs of his Diſcernment, and the Uprightneſs of his Judgment will be apt to forſake him: His Reaſon will bend towards the favourite Side, and very hardly be brought to acknowledge that falſe, which he paſſionately deſires ſhould be true. Where the Argument is againſt us, Demonſtration will not convince; and where 'tis for us, the leaſt Probabilities have the Power of it.

If Men judged truly of their Intereſt, this Bent and Inclination of the Underſtanding towards it, in the Search of Truth, would be no Diſadvantage to us. 'Tis certainly, in its ſelf, a wiſe Proviſion of the Author of our Nature, to direct us to our proper Good. For there is a perfect Agreement and Correſpondence between Truth and Happineſs;

neither can it ever be our real Interest to deny any Truth. But the Misfortune is, That Men propose false and imaginary Interests as their proper Happiness. These are always contrary to Truth, and by an Attachment to them, the Weight is put into the wrong Scale, and the Understanding is bias's'd to Error, which alone can support such a Choice. And when we observe, that the Interests of Passion have the Advantage of early Prepossession, and offer present Ease and Satisfaction, we cannot wonder if they are often preferr'd to the Interests of Reason, which are long before they begin to appear to us; are then generally Reversions, and require Pains and Reflection to represent them in their proper Value. Suppose, then, a Man passionately engaged to vitious Pleasures, to the Satisfactions of any one irregular Appetite; this is his Point of Happiness, the governing End of all his Pursuits. Whatever promotes or encourages this Gratification, will have his Esteem and Applause; and whatever interrupts or opposes it, will be sure

ſure of his Reſentment. Let a Philoſopher try, by all the Topicks of Reaſon and Duty, to convince him of his Error; his Truths will fall upon a Rock, impenetrable, and immoveable; the moſt fallacious Colour of an Argument, even a Jeſt, will be thought a ſufficient Refutation. But let his Deſires abate, and the Object he doated on become indifferent to him; the Man will preſently be capable of Reaſon; and the Truths he was deaf to before, will have their due Weight and Impreſſion. What is it that makes the Difference in this Caſe? Are the Arguments which now convince him, more concluſive than they were before? No; the Difference is in the Man. The Impediment that hinder'd his Acknowledgment of Truth, is removed: It no longer appears to oppoſe his Intereſt, and therefore he has no longer any Averſion from it.

UNLESS Paſſion could obſcure the Light, and overbear the Remonſtrances of Reaſon, there could be no ſuch Thing as Vice in the World: For every Vice

is

is contrary to right Reaſon, and reproved by it. And conſequently, every vitious Man is a Proof of the Concluſion in Queſtion: And tho' the Power of Mens Luſts in corrupting their Judgments, appears chiefly with regard to practical Truths; yet if any ſpeculative Truth draws after it Conſequences equally repugnant to the Intereſts of a Man's Paſſions, it will be equally oppoſed by them. Did Men enter upon moral and religious Inquiries, with the ſame Indifference as they do on mathematical, they would acknowledge Truth as readily in one, as they do in the other. But the Concluſions of the former will not be reconciled to ſome Purſuits in which the Man has placed his Happineſs: They oblige him to condemn ſome beloved of his Soul, which he cannot be prevail'd on to part with. Every Faculty ſtands upon Guard to defend this Treaſure; and will hear no Reaſon, ſuffer nothing to approach, that threatens to deprive him of it. Since therefore, the corrupt Luſts and Paſſions of Men, are ſo apt to blind their Judgment,

ment, and ſo ſtrongly diſpoſe them to reſiſt and contradict the Evidence of Truth, whenever it cannot be reconciled to their Indulgences; if it appears upon our

II^d^ INQUIRY, That the Chriſtian Religion is irreconcileably oppoſite to every vitious and immoral Intereſt, it is a juſt Preſumption, that this is the true Cauſe of its being rejected.

THAT the Goſpel is thus oppoſite to the corrupt Intereſts of Paſſion, we need no other Proof than an Appeal to its Doctrines. We there find every Luſt reſtrain'd; every Appetite of our Nature brought under Rule and Diſcipline, and confined to certain and thoſe narrow Limits. Every Proſelyte to this Religion is required, under a ſolemn Covenant, to abjure every Satisfaction that exceeds thoſe Bounds; to mortify every ſenſual Deſire; nay not only to renounce all irregular Pleaſure, but the moſt innocent Enjoyments of Life, and even Life itſelf, whenever it ſtands in Competition

Competition with his Duty. And the chief Encouragement propoſed to ſupport his Compliance with theſe ſevere Terms, is a diſtant Proſpect of Reward in another World, and the Comforts that may ariſe to him from that Expectation. And can it be wonder'd, that ſuch a Religion as this ſhould meet with Oppoſition? That Men devoted to the Intereſts of their Luſts, ſhould unwillingly admit a Rule of Life, ſo irreconcileable to thoſe Intereſts? What Evidence of Truth can you imagine, clear enough to over-rule ſuch a Prejudice? Can you hope to convince a Man by Argument, that 'tis his Duty to be miſerable? He has placed his ſupreme Felicity in the Satisfactions you would take from him: He prefers them to all that your Religion offers him, and thinks the Loſs of them a more terrible Evil, than all it threatens. If you can find him a Religion that will indulge him in his Luſts, he may probably be your Convert: But to propoſe the Evidences of ſuch a Religion as the Goſpel, to a Mind thus preposſeſs'd againſt its Rules, is beginning at the

the wrong End. Before you can convince his Underſtanding of the Authority of the Teacher, you muſt reconcile his Affections to his Doctrines; make him ſenſible that he miſtakes his Intereſt, and purſues his own Deſtruction; and that a Submiſſion to the Diſcipline of Chriſt, will be attended with Satisfactions infinitely preferable to thoſe he is fond of. Thus divine Wiſdom addreſſes Mankind. *My Fruit is better than Gold, and my Revenue than choice Silver* *. Thus our bleſſed Maſter invites Men to become his Diſciples. *Come unto me all that travel, and are heavy laden, and I will refreſh you* †. 'Tis by this Motive he ſollicites our Faith, *that He who believeth on him, ſhall not periſh, but have eternal Life* ‖. He firſt endeavours to convince us, that 'tis worth our while to attend to him; that 'tis our Wiſdom and Intereſt to comply with the Terms he propoſes; and according as he ſucceeds in this Application, the Proofs of his Authority will appear more or leſs concluſive. If the Proſpects he opens to

* Prov. viii. 19. † St. Matt. xi. 28. ‖ St. John iii. 15.

our Faith, can recommend Virtue to our Choice, and render the Vices he reproves our Averſion, he will eaſily perſuade us to acknowledge his Authority. As a good Man aſſents with Joy to the Chriſtian Revelation, becauſe it appears conducive to his ſupreme Happineſs, and propoſes a noble Encouragement to his Virtues; ſo a wicked Man rejects it, becauſe 'tis contrary to his beloved Intereſts; cuts him off from all that is delightful to his Soul, and, like the unacceptable Prophet to the King of *Iſrael*, *propheſies no Good concerning him, but only Evil continually* *: And therefore he reſolves not to hear its Reaſons, nor own its Authority. But let his Notions of Happineſs be changed; let the ſpiritual Pleaſures of our Religion, and the Rewards of Eternity take hold of his Heart and Deſires, and be confeſs'd an over-ballance to the Gratifications of his Luſts, the Proofs of the Goſpel will appear in a quite different Light; their Evidence be perceiv'd, and their Force ſubmitted to.

* 2 Chron. xviii. 7.

LET

Let us, then, ſtand ſtill a little, and conſider what the Evidence we have produced amounts to. That a ſtrong Attachment to a miſtaken Intereſt, will render a Man impatient of hearing, and obſtinate in reſiſting any Truth which is oppoſite to that Intereſt, is a Concluſion of common Experience. It is alſo manifeſt, that the Doctrines of the Goſpel are irreconcileably oppoſite to the Intereſts of Paſſion: Intereſts, which are found, in daily Obſervation, to take ſuch hold on Men, that no Advice, no Reaſon or Authority is able to reclaim their Affections from them. It is certain, that were the Goſpel never ſo well proved, yet, by Men thus prepoſſeſs'd againſt it, the Force of theſe Proofs wou'd either not be ſeen, or not be confeſs'd. Here is then a Cauſe aſſign'd, ſufficient to account for Mens rejecting the Goſpel; and a Cauſe put in Action; provoked by the Doctrines of this Religion, to exert its utmoſt Force in oppoſing it. It is therefore a very juſt and a very ſtrong Preſumption, that this is the real ground

of

of Mens Quarrel againſt it. Well, but the moral Rules of Goſpel whoſe Contradiction to Mens Luſt we aſſign as the Cauſe of their oppoſing it, are not objected to; but 'tis the Evidence of its Divine Authority is queſtion'd. But if an Acknowledgment of the Authority of the Goſpel, draws after it, by neceſſary Conſequence, the Obligation of its Laws; the ſame Intereſts that withold Mens Submiſſion to its Laws, will equally diſpoſe them to reject its Authority. And obvious Reaſons may be given, why Men, whoſe Averſion from Chriſtianity really proceeds from an Impatience of its moral Reſtraints, ſhould chooſe to drop that Motive, and turn the Diſpute, not againſt the Matter, but the Authority, of the Command. For a direct Patronage of Vice, is but heavy unreputable Work; and which, as bad as the World is, few will care to appear in. But in diſputing the Authority of the Reſtraint; the Infidel aſſumes a Character of better Figure and Eſteem: He here pretends to a deeper Penetration, and a more accurate Diſcernment

than other Men. The attempt on this ſide will bear a better Face; and (which is conſiderable) may hope for more Succeſs and Applauſe from the World. For Men are, generally, inclined to think the moral Commands of the Goſpel reaſonable enough, where they do not interfere with their perſonal Vices. Few therefore, would concur with an open Defence of Immorality, any farther than their particular Paſſions gave them an Intereſt in the Argument. Where they were not thus prejudiced, they would declare againſt it. But an Attack on the Authority of this Religion, comprehends the Intereſt of every Paſſion. Every Vice will favour an Expedient which equally ſerves all, and ſets every Man at Liberty, to purſue what each thinks fit to call his Reaſon. We can give, you ſee, plain Reaſons, why Men, whoſe real Diſſatisfaction ariſes from the Matter of the Command, ſhould rather turn the Diſpute againſt its Authority: And therefore a Profeſſion to diſtruſt the Evidence of the Goſpel, does not in the leaſt abate our Suſpition, that the true Motive to

that

that Profeſſion is an Averſion from its Diſcipline. And when we recollect, from a former Inquiry, that the Goſpel is as fully proved, as any reaſonable Man can expect that any Divine Revelation ſhould be, our Suſpition is not only probable, but has all the Certainty that any Concluſion of that Nature admits of. For when the Cauſe pretended for this Oppoſition, appears to be without any juſt Foundation; and the Cauſe we aſſign, Mens Engagement to the Intereſts of their Paſſions, is every way proportion'd to this Effect, will overrule the Evidence of Truth, and is provoked to oppoſe, with its utmoſt Activity, the Truth of the Goſpel, there can be no longer any reaſonable Doubt, but this is the true Cauſe of that Oppoſition.

I cannot imagine what farther can be offer'd in Bar to this Concluſion, unleſs it be this —— That this way of Arguing ſuppoſes every Man, who diſputes the Authority of the Goſpel, to be a wicked immoral Man. It does ſo; and

what then? Why, they can produce, among the Oppoſers of Chriſtianity, Men of a very regular unblameable Life. Some few perhaps they may; it is manifeſt, the far greater Number of their Adherents are of a quite different Character. And when theſe few are examin'd, are they ſure we can find no Vice in them, capable of accounting for this Oppoſition? The Goſpel is equally irreconcileable to every Vice; and if a Man be firmly attach'd to any one Point, which he cannot reconcile with that Religion, this one will certainly determine him to reject it. We have an Example of this in the young Man who came to Chriſt. He had lived, from his Youth up, in the moſt exact Regularity; and ſeem'd very well diſpoſed to become a Convert to the Goſpel. But when our Lord told him, that the Terms of his Religion went ſtill farther, and obliged him, whenever he required it, to part with his great Poſſeſſions, this touched the tender Place in his Affections; he was preſently offended, and would hear no more.

SOME

SOME flegmatick Tempers may be free from the more impetuous Luſt of Senſuality; Or Men may, from Motives of Prudence, refrain from all infamous Vices, and practice many reputable Virtues: They may be chaſte and temperate, juſt and charitable, either from Conſtitution, or out of ſecular Policy. Such a Character as this will ſhine in common Life, and appear not only without Blame, but with Credit and Eſteem; And yet may conſiſt with ſuch Vices, as tho' they make no Shew, may yet determine the Man to the moſt obſtinate Oppoſition of Chriſtianity. I will inſtance in ſpiritual Pride, or a vain Opinion of a Man's own Underſtanding. To a Man under the Dominion of this Paſſion, 'tis dull and undiſtinguiſhing to think in the common Road, and believe with the Vulgar. To engage the Attention of the World, he muſt pretend to ſee farther, to form his Judgment of Things with more Caution and Sagacity than other Men. Even the Shame of retracting what he has once aſſerted,

is to ſuch a Temper inſupportable. He will contradict the cleareſt Evidence, and even ſacrifice, almoſt, any Intereſt rather than ſubmit to it. A remarkable Inſtance of the Force of this ſingle Paſſion, we have in the famous *Vanini*, who choſe to ſuffer Death, rather than own a God. Amazing! That a Man who profeſs'd to have no Proſpect but in this Life, ſhould give up his All, his very Being, rather than renounce an exploded, unprofitable Aſſertion. Whoſe Reſentment did he fear, or from whom did he expect any Reward of his Perſeverance? What poſſible Account can be given of ſuch a Conduct, but the inflexible Stubbornneſs of his Vanity? To what Degree of Obſtinacy, any of our modern Unbelievers are influenced by this Paſſion, we cannot diſcover, till publick Wiſdom ſhall think fit to put them under greater Diſcouragements than they find among us. But if they pretend to diſclaim its Impreſſions, I would only ask them, by what Motives they are induced to publiſh their Sentiments, and appear ſo ſollicitous to proſelyte Men to

to a Disbelief of the Goſpel. Is it a mere ſpeculative Love of Truth? But Truth (as I obſerv'd) barely as ſuch, is ſeldom regarded with much Affection. If Truth were ſo amiable for its own ſake, the moſt obvious indiſputable Truths would be the moſt paſſionately affected; but, on the contrary, none are look'd on with more Indifference. We may be ſure, ſome Intereſt or other depends on a Concluſion, when we find it eagerly contended for. We have ſeen, in the preſent Queſtion, that every vitious Paſſion has an Intereſt in oppoſing the Goſpel; and that Vanity, by its ſelf, is ſufficient to account for the moſt obſtinate Infidelity: But to the Publication of this Infidelity, no Motive can be aſſign'd but Vanity. Every other Paſſion would be content with its private Gratifications. 'Tis apparently the Intereſt of the *Libertine*, that the reſt of the World ſhould be under the Reſtraints of Religion. He knows the Extent of their Rule, how far they can go, and where they muſt ſtop, and leave his Purſuits without any farther Com-

petition. 'Tis his Vanity only that tempts him, to deprive himſelf of theſe Advantages. He muſt let the World ſee the Superiority of his Parts, the Depth of his Penetration, and his Skill in Diſputation.

If, to avoid this Imputation, they pretend a Principle of Charity for this Conduct; that 'tis Compaſſion to the Ignorance of a deluded World, a Zeal to reſcue Mankind from Impoſture and Superſtition, that renders them thus ſollicitous to undeceive them; this is yet a more improbable Account than the former. For can they ſeriouſly think they conſult the Happineſs of Mankind, by endeavouring to take off the Obligations of this Religion? A Religion, which, under the Awe of a divine Command, and the Dread of eternal Miſery, requires the Practice of every Virtue that can render Men eaſy in themſelves, and uſeful to one another; and forbids every Action that may diſturb the Order and Quiet of human Life. Can it be for our Advantage, that ſo wiſe

wiſe and beneficial an Inſtitution ſhould be diſcarded? Have they any Equivalent to ſubſtitute in the Place of it? Nothing, it ſeems, but natural Reaſon; which comes, in the Event, (as we have ſeen) to no more than this; that every Man muſt be left to do what he pleaſes.

An admirable Proviſion, no doubt, for the Virtue, Peace, and Felicity of the World! We think ourſelves happy in the Proſpects, and even in the Reſtraints of the Goſpel; and can conceive nothing more deſireable in this Life, than that the Power of this Religion may more effectually prevail, and the Duties it preſcribes be univerſally practiced. Suppoſe, then, theſe ſagacious Gentlemen to be perſuaded we are miſtaken; yet unleſs they had ſomething better to offer us, methinks, Charity would perſuade them to let us alone to enjoy our Deluſion. Do they expect, we ſhould thank them for awakening us out of ſo pleaſing a Dream, mortifying thoſe glorious Hopes with which we entertain ourſelves, and depriving us of

ſo noble a Support under the Afflictions of Life; and, what is ſtill worſe, taking off all Reſtraint from the Luſts and Paſſions of Men, and turning looſe ſuch a Den of wild Beaſts, to worry and diſtract the World? To ſome thoughtleſs Wretches, abandon'd to Vice and Wickedneſs, it may perhaps appear a Service, to diſcharge the Authority and Reproofs of this Religion: But the wiſe and the virtuous, every Man who values his own, or wiſhes his Neighbour's Happineſs, muſt reſent the Attempt with Abhorrence and Deteſtation. Neither Charity nor Prudence, then, will adviſe ſuch a Conduct; we muſt look for the Motives of it, among the Paſſions whoſe Intereſt it ſerves. And tho' (as I have obſerv'd) every Luſt may incline Men to Infidelity, yet all but Vanity wou'd perſuade the Concealment of it. 'Tis this Paſſion only that puſhes them on to a Publication of it. They cannot be eaſy, without the Satisfaction and Support of Applauſe. Their Underſtanding muſt triumph in a Retinue of Converts, and appear in the Head of a Party. A Party indeed they have;

have; but when they obſerve the Characters that compoſe it, methinks their Pride itſelf ſhould deſpiſe its Conqueſts, and be aſhamed of the Admiration of Profligates and Fools.

Upon the whole, we have ſeen, how clearly Mens Rejection of the Goſpel, and the whole Conduct of the Infidel in oppoſing it, is reſolved into our Lord's Account, the Influence of ſome corrupt Paſſion or other. This Account cannot be at all ſurprizing, when we obſerve, with what Obſtinacy any one Luſt will diſpute its Poſſeſſion of the Heart; by what Shifts and Evaſions it will cover it ſelf from the Reproach of Truth; by what gradual Steps of falſe Reaſoning it will lead a Man on from one Error, and one evil Reſolution, to another. He cannot reconcile himſelf, to part with the Gratification he doats on; but then the Terrors of the Goſpel ſtand before him, threatning Damnation to ſuch Indulgences. He may firſt, perhaps, try whether this hard and rigorous Law, be not capable of a more mitigated Senſe;

Senſe; whether the Sentence be altogether ſo ſevere and peremptory, as 'tis repreſented. Perhaps his Obedience to other Precepts, may attone for his Violation of this; Or however, he may repent of it ſome Time hence, and ſecure his Title to the Promiſes of Chriſtianity. And if he can cheat himſelf into any of theſe common Deluſions, he troubles himſelf no farther. He thinks he has compounded the Matter, and brought his Sin to a very good Conſiſtency with his Religion. But if he cannot ſatisfy himſelf with any of theſe Expedients, there is no farther Project of Mediation between Sin and Duty, and he is reduced to this ſhort Dilemma, he muſt renounce either his Vice, or his Baptiſm. And here, perhaps, he may pauſe a little, before he takes the dark Leap; he may have ſome Struggle and Conflict with his Religion, before he can give it up: But if the Luſt be firmly rooted, it will go on a Step farther, and ſuggeſt to him, that poſſibly he has been impoſed on in the Authority aſcribed to this ſevere Law; that all

all may be but a Device of Prieſt-craft, or a Contrivance of State to awe Mankind; and when an eager Appetite and the Uneaſineſs of an unmortify'd Deſire are Directers of the Inquiry, the Underſtanding overlooks the cleareſt Evidence, and the ſlighteſt Objection will appear a Demonſtration. But ſtill the Singularity of his Opinion, will give him ſome Trouble. For Vanity itſelf, tho' it finds a Pleaſure in departing from common Sentiments, yet cannot well ſuſtain the Reflection of being perfectly alone, and oppoſing the univerſal Judgment of Mankind. He muſt, therefore, perſuade Others to approve his Reaſonings, and concur in the ſame Concluſions. And if he has an Opinion of his Parts and Talent at Argument, he will venture into the Field, and engage in an open Diſpute with Religion. And if either the Weakneſs of thoſe he attempts, or the Averſion of their Luſts from the Goſpel, gives any Succeſs to his Applications, this he looks on as a deciſive Confirmation of his Judgment. He has tried the Reaſon of other Men, and prevail'd

vail'd in their Conviction. He ſurveys with Pride the Conqueſts of his Underſtanding; conſiders himſelf as the applauded Champion of a Party, and muſt not diſhonour his Character, by receding from any Thing he has aſſerted. And thus, fix'd in the *Scorner's Chair*, he defies all Oppoſition, and triumphs in reſolv'd Infidelity.

THIS, we ſee, is an eaſy, natural Proceſs of our Corruption. A Man paſſionately engaged to any Habit of Sin, and prepoſſeſs'd againſt the Duties of Chriſtianity, unleſs by the Grace of God he conquers that Averſion, will be drawn on to act and reaſon in the Manner I have deſcribed. And if none of thoſe Remonſtrances of Conſcience, which ariſe in his Way, can awaken the Soul from this Deluſion of its Luſts; be the Goſpel ever ſo true, its Evidence will not be perceiv'd, or will not be acknowledg'd. The Sinner will go on from one Degree of Blindneſs and Impiety to another, till at laſt he takes up with the Per-

Perſuaſion of the Fool, and *ſays in his Heart there is no God* *.

AND ſince an Averſion from the Duties of Religion gives us ſo obvious, and ſo full an Account of the whole Conduct of the Infidel; and we can diſcern no real Ground for his Diſſent; no probable Motive, but this, for his profeſſing it; we may juſtly conclude, with our Saviour, that the true Reaſon of Mens rejecting and oppoſing the Credit of his Goſpel, is their Engagement to their Sins, and the Wickedneſs of their Lives. I ſhall, therefore, look upon the Charge in my Text as ſufficiently proved, and proceed to aſſert the Juſtice of the Sentence here pronounced upon it.

* Pſalm xiv. 1.

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

JOHN III. XIX.

This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were evil.

THAT our Lord has done no Injuſtice to the Rejecters of his Goſpel, in the Aſſertion of my Text; that He has imputed their Infidelity to the only Motive which can account for it, a corrupt Attachment to the Intereſts of Paſſion, has appear'd to us with as much Evidence, as a Con-

cluſion of that Nature admits. And, I think, we might venture to conclude, without entring into any farther Argument, that rejecting a divine Revelation, ſo atteſted as the Goſpel, in compliance with ſuch baſe Motives, is a Crime deſerving the Condemnation here pronounced upon it. But, among other Libertine Maxims, it has been much inſiſted on, —— That Faith is an Act of the Underſtanding in which we are wholly paſſive, and which we can neither direct nor reſtrain: That he who believes a Thing cannot avoid believing it, and he who disbelieves cannot help disbelieving; and conſequently, that a juſt God cannot charge him with any Crime in either; or inflict on him any Penalty, for a mere neceſſary, involuntary Action. Now, if this be admitted, our Saviour muſt here have acted without Authority, and pronounced a Sentence without Commiſſion from God. It therefore concerns us to obviate this Plea, and ſhew from ſome natural Principles,

Iſt. That

Iſt. THAT rejecting a divine Revelation, ſufficiently propoſed and atteſted to us, is a Crime which God may juſtly puniſh.

IIly. THAT the Infidelity of thoſe among us, who reject the Chriſtian Revelation, is attended with all the Aggravations, that ſuch a Crime can admit.

Iſt. THEN, I aſſert, that the rejecting a divine Revelation, ſufficiently propoſed and atteſted, is a Crime which God may juſtly puniſh.

To a Chriſtian, indeed, who profeſſes to believe the holy Writings of the Goſpel, one would think, no other Proof need be offer'd for this Concluſion, than what ariſes from the great Promiſes there made to Faith. For if we are paſſive in disbelieving, we are alſo paſſive in believing; and it can no more conſiſt with divine Juſtice to reward the One, than to puniſh the Other. And if neither

of theſe are capable of Puniſhment or Reward, thoſe two great Laws of Chriſt —— *He that believeth, and is baptized, ſhall be ſaved; and he who believeth not, ſhall be damned* *, are at once render'd inſignificant Aſſertions. And, I think, when theſe are taken away, the Chriſtian Religion is diſmiſs'd together with them. It is, therefore, ſurprizing, to find the Innocence of Disbelief contended for, by any who call themſelves Chriſtians. Whatever they are, I ſhall, in this Argument, take Leave to conſider them as Infidels; and endeavour their Conviction from ſuch natural Principles, as, I preſume, every reaſonable Man muſt aſſent to.

THAT we are accountable to God, for the Uſe of every Faculty he has given us, ſo far as we are free in the Exerciſe of it, is a Concluſion which neceſſarily follows from the Acknowledgment of a God, the Author of our Being, and the Judge of our Actions;

* Mark xvi. 16.

and

and is ſuppoſed in the Reaſoning of our Adverſaries themſelves, who offer this only in Excuſe of Infidelity, that 'tis an involuntary Act.

Now, tho' it be acknowledg'd, that we are wholly paſſive in the actual Perceptions of the Underſtanding, ſo that what we do perceive, we cannot but perceive; and what we perceive, we cannot, at that Time, perceive any otherwiſe than it actually appears to us; yet in the Exerciſe or Direction of this Faculty we are ſo far free, that we can either apply the Mind to any Object, or take it off from it at Pleaſure; and be more or leſs attentive in the Conſideration of it. Theſe are voluntary Acts, and, as ſuch, ſubject to Law; and ſince the Clearneſs and Diſtinction of our Perceptions, and even our Notice of an Object, depend on the Direction and Attention of the Mind to it, for the ſame Reaſons that we are accountable for theſe Acts, we are alſo accountable for not perceiving what 'twas in our Power, by a due Application, to have perceiv'd.

Our Aſſent depends upon, and is proportion'd to, our Perceptions of Evidence; and therefore, is influenced by our Attention or Inattention, in the ſame Manner as our Perceptions are. * A late Ornament of our Church, indeed, has learnedly, and, I think, plainly proved, Aſſent to be an Act of the Will, and not of the Underſtanding; but nevertheleſs, it muſt be confeſs'd to be thus far neceſſarily determin'd, that what we clearly perceive to be true, we cannot help aſſenting to; neither can we help diſſenting from what we clearly perceive to be falſe. But then it cannot be denied, that we may aſſent to what we do not clearly perceive to be true, and diſſent from what we do not clearly perceive to be falſe. Or if any Man be ſo vain, as not to acknowledge himſelf capable of theſe Defects, yet to others, to thoſe who oppoſe his Concluſions, he will be ready enough to impute them. If Men act neceſſarily

* Mr. *Norris*'s Account of *Reaſon* and *Faith*.

in

in theſe erroneous Aſſents, why does any one ſtrive to convince them? Does not every Argument we uſe for the Conviction of another, ſuppoſe it in his Power both to attend to and perceive the Force of it, and that he is under an Obligation to aſſent to the Truth it proves? Whence then does this Obligation, ſo univerſally preſumed, in every Diſpute between Man and Man ariſe? Is it not plainly from this Principle — That every Man, as a rational Being, is bound to aſſent upon ſuch Evidence, as, by a due Uſe of his Faculties, he may perceive to be concluſive? This then is a Law of our Nature, appeal'd to in every Argument, and which neceſſarily ſuppoſes

1ſt. THAT there are certain Degrees of Evidence, which, as rational Beings, we may, if we attend, perceive to be concluſive. And tho' our Eſtimate of theſe Abilities be various, according to the different Capacities of Men, and their Opportunities of Improvement, yet in every Man, with whom we think

fit to diſpute, we ſuppoſe a Capacity to apprehend the Force of the Evidence we offer him. And in every publick Argument, we appeal to the common Reaſon of Mankind, as enabling great Numbers to diſcern the Evidence of thoſe Truths we propoſe. And ſome Degrees of Evidence there are, which we preſume every one, whom we admit within the Character of a reaſonable Nature, able to perceive. Now the Evidences of Truth may be diſtinguiſh'd into *Internal* and *External.* Internal are thoſe, which ſet before us the Connexion or Repugnancy of the Ideas affirm'd or deny'd of each other, either by an immediate Collation of the two Ideas in Conſideration, or by the Interpoſition of a third, which, as a Meaſure ſucceſſively apply'd to each, ſhews the Agreement or Inconſiſtency of them. *External,* which does not pretend to ſhew us any Connexion between the Ideas, but calls upon us to admit there is ſuch a Connexion, upon the Affirmation of a Perſon who certainly knows whether there is or not. This Evi-

dence,

dence, in its proper Subjects, is as reaſonable and concluſive as the former. And he who ſhould univerſally reject this Kind of Evidence, would as juſtly be reputed an Idiot or a Madman, as he who univerſally rejected the former. In other Words, he who refuſes to aſſent upon Authority, in a Subject incapable of other Evidence, and where neither the Knowledge nor Credibility of the Affirmer can juſtly be queſtion'd, acts every Jot as unreaſonably, as he who refuſes to aſſent upon Evidence from the Reaſon of the Thing, to which he can make no juſt Objection. And when we conſider how little the beſt Underſtandings do know, how very little the Bulk of Mankind can know, from the Reaſon of the Thing, even in Queſtions of great Concern to them, we cannot but perceive, what Confuſion and Diſtreſs human Reaſon muſt be reduced to, what a Suſpenſion of all Buſineſs and Action in Life muſt follow, if we wholly reject Authority as no Evidence of Truth. 'Tis alſo

2ly.

2ly Supposed, in that Law which every Argument appeals to, that every Man acts with Liberty, in the Uſe or Direction of thoſe Faculties, by which he inquires into, and judges of, Truth. For if he were perfectly paſſive in the exerciſe of theſe Faculties, 'twould be to no more purpoſe to argue with him, than with a Clock or a Weather-Glaſs: He muſt go as he was ſet, and could go no otherwiſe. And as we have obſerved, with regard to our Preceptions, that tho' we are ſo far paſſive, that we cannot but perceive what is actually repreſented to our Mind, and cannot, at that time, perceive it otherwiſe than as 'tis repreſented; yet we can be more or leſs attentive to any Object; we can dwell longer or leſs Time upon it; and find, in continual experience, that by ſuch Attention we can enlarge, multiply, and often correct our Preceptions: So alſo with reſpect to Aſſent; tho' we cannot help aſſenting to what we clearly perceive to be true, or diſſenting from what we clearly perceive to be falſe; yet

yet whoever reflects on what paſſes in his own Mind, muſt obſerve, that he can with-hold or ſuſpend his Aſſent, till he has fully try'd the Evidences of what is propoſed; till he perceives Truth or Falſehood, either from internal or external Evidence, according as the Nature of the Subject appears to require the One or the Other. That he often finds Reaſons to recal his Aſſent, or Diſſent: And, whether he will confeſs it of himſelf, or not, he will blame other Men for Aſſenting or Diſſenting without due Examination; for ſuffering Prejudices or Paſſions to obſcure the Evidence of Truth, or divert them from attending to it. Theſe are plain Acknowledgments both of Freedom in theſe Faculties, and of a Duty attending us in the Exerciſe of them. It is ſuppoſed in every Argument, that, the Evidence we offer is ſufficient for Conviction; that the Perſon we diſpute with, is able, by a due Uſe of his Faculties, to perceive it to be ſo, and that he is bound by the Laws of Reaſon to aſſent upon it. And for the Tranſgreſſion of theſe Laws, we

are very ready to accuſe and reprove one another. If then we are thus far free in the Uſe of theſe Faculties, if a due Application of them is an Act of Juſtice we owe to one another, much more muſt we be accountable for it to God, the Author of our Nature, and every Power of it. Every Law of our Nature muſt ultimately derive its Force from his Authority; and whatever Obligations we and our Fellow-Subjects mutually claim on one another, are, in their firſt moſt proper Conſideration, Duties we owe to Him. And, therefore, when we appeal to Reaſon and Juſtice, as requiring Men to beſtow ſuch Attention on any Subject as is due to it, to ſuſpend Aſſent or Diſſent to any Propoſition, till, according to their Abilities, they have examin'd the Evidence that ſupports it, and then to proportion their Aſſent to that Evidence; if we mean any thing reducible to any clear Principle, it muſt be — That God, the Author of our Nature, and Judge of our Actions, requires this Conduct from us. — And conſequently, we muſt offend him whenever

ever we act contrary to theſe Rules; when we refuſe ſuch Attention to any Subject, as is due to the Importance of it; when we aſſent to any Error, which we might have diſcern'd, or reſiſt any Truth offer'd to us with ſufficient Evidence, and ſuch as 'twas in our Power to have perceiv'd. But eſpecially, when immoral Luſts and Prejudices are the Motives of ſuch a Conduct; when, in Compliance with their Impreſſions, we turn away our Eyes, and will not attend to Truth, or ſhut them againſt the Entrance of it, ſuch an Abuſe of our Faculties muſt be diſpleaſing to God, whatever is the Subject before us.

But where the Subject is of the higheſt moral Importance, the Rule of our Actions, and the Meaſure of our Duty, and the Evidence, which calls for our Aſſent, is ſo clear and obvious, that whoever has Eyes, and will but open them, may perceive it; to be remiſs in our Attention, muſt be a great Offence. Even Ignorance muſt here be voluntary, and can offer no Excuſe for Error. But to

ſuffer

ſuffer any corrupt Motives to obſtruct or over-bear ſuch Evidence, and in ſuch an Inquiry, is not only tranſgreſſing, but, in Effect, renouncing the Law of our Nature, and bidding Defiance to the Author of it.

From what has been reflected it appears, I think, in full Proof, that the Suggeſtion offer'd in Excuſe of Infidelity is falſe: That Men are not wholly paſſive in Believing or Disbelieving, but have a great Compaſs of Liberty, in the Uſe and Direction of thoſe Faculties, on which our Aſſent, and even our Perceptions, depend. So far as this Liberty reaches, they are voluntary Acts, and therefore naturally ſubject to a Law, for the Tranſgreſſion of which we are accountable to God. And ſince the Obligation and Penalties of this Law, muſt riſe in Proportion to the moral Importance of the Subject propoſed to us, and no Queſtion can be of ſo great Moment, as whether what is affirm'd to be a Revelation of the Will of God really is ſo, or not; it follows, that to act contrary

trary to the Laws of Reaſon in this Inquiry, either to diſmiſs the Propoſal of it without due Attention, or to ſuffer any Luſts, or immoral Prejudices, to ſuppreſs the Evidence offer'd for it, is, even in the Accounts of Nature, the greateſt Crime we can be guilty of in the Exerciſe of theſe Faculties; and conſequently, ſuch as muſt expoſe us to the juſt Reſentments of God.

THE Plea offer'd in Defence of Infidelity from any natural Guilt, as an involuntary Act, has, perhaps, led me into a Proceſs of Argument, which may ſeem too Metaphyſical. But my Concluſion may alſo be directly inferr'd from the moſt obvious Principles of Natural Religion.

THAT whatever God affirms to us is to be believ'd, I ſhall look upon as a ſelf-evident Principle. And that beſides the Natural Dictates of right Reaſon, God may farther communicate his Will to us by ſpecial Declarations, either by immediate Revelation to our ſelves, or by ſending

ſending Others to us commiſſion'd by ſuch immediate Revelation, is what no one has yet thought fit to deny. And that 'tis poſſible for us certainly to know when ſuch a Revelation is made to our ſelves, or when others are ſent by his Commiſſion, muſt alſo be allowed; becauſe otherwiſe ſuch Revelations would be in vain, and to no manner of Uſe, or Purpoſe. When, therefore, any Perſon produces the beſt Proofs, that in ſuch a Caſe can be given, or expected, that he is ſent to us by God, and ſpeaks by his Authority; to refuſe our Aſſent to what he affirms, is to contradict God, and call him a Liar. We are, indeed, not only at Liberty, but 'tis our Duty, to examine his Credentials, by the beſt Rules of Inquiry in our Power: But if there appears no Defect in the Proofs of his Commiſſion, we are bound, under the ſtricteſt Obligations, to receive and believe him: And, to reject his Meſſage, muſt be the greateſt Affront to the Veracity and Authority of God; and, conſequently, what his Juſtice will certainly puniſh.

THAT thoſe, among us, who reject the Goſpel of *Jeſus Chriſt*, are guilty of this Crime, aggravated by all the Circumſtances which can render it inexcuſable before God, is what I in the 2d place aſſerted.

THAT they are guilty of rejecting a Divine Revelation ſufficiently atteſted, we are at Liberty to conclude, from what has been offer'd in the preceding Diſcourſes; in which I endeavour'd to ſhew, that we have all the Inducements to believe the Goſpel to be a divine Revelation, that the Nature of the Subject requires or admits; as much, and as good, Proof as could be expected, ſuppoſing it had been reveal'd by God: And that the Objections, pretending to invalidate the Force of it, are weak and frivolous, and ſuch as ought not to be allow'd any Weight in this Queſtion. In ſum, that we have all the Evidence, that any rational Man can deſire, that our Lord and his Apoſtles acted by a Divine Commiſſion; were themſelves

taught of God, and ſent by him to declare his Will to Mankind: And therefore, rejecting their Authority is rejecting a Divine Revelation, as well atteſted as 'tis poſſible any ſhould be.

From the ſame Proofs alſo it appears, that rejecting this Revelation is ſinning againſt the cleareſt Light, the moſt effectual Means of Conviction that could be required. The Proofs of the Goſpel are not only firm and concluſive, ſuch as will bear the ſtricteſt Examination, but, in their Nature, ſo plain and ſimple, that no Capacity is below the force of them. Their Evidence does not reſult from a long Train of reaſoning from remote Principles, but we are immediately led to our Concluſion by ſenſible Miracles; an Argument, which, whoever has the common Senſes of Mankind, is as capable of apprehending, as the moſt profound Philoſopher; and conſequently, reſiſting the Evidence of ſuch a Proof can admit of no Excuſe: It muſt be owing either to Obſtinacy, or a criminal Inattention, if it is not perceiv'd, and

acknowledg'd. And agreeably, tho' our Saviour allows, that *if he had not done* among the Jews *the Works which none other Man did, they had not had Sin*; * yet ſince he had actually done ſuch Works *as none could do, except God was with him,* † and ſuch, both for Number and Power, as none other, even of thoſe who had been ſent by God, had ever perform'd, he very juſtly concludes, That *now they had no Cloak for their Sin.* || And ſince we have at this day, all the Evidence that ſuch Miracles were wrought, that the Nature of the Subject requires or admits; and, conſequently, all that can in Equity be expected; 'tis as much our Duty to make the proper Inference from them as it was theirs, and we are as much without Excuſe in the rejecting the Goſpel, as they were.

'Tis, as we have obſerv'd, a farther Addition to the Guilt of any Error, that 'tis committed in an Inquiry of the higheſt Concern and Importance. Had it

* John xv. 24. † John iii. 2. || John xv. 22.

been a mere ſpeculative Queſtion, whether the Goſpel were a Divine Revelation or not; our Ignorance, Inattention, or Miſtake had been excuſable. The Theory had hardly been worth our debating, and 'twere no great Matter on which Side we determin'd it. But ſince this is in the Nature and Conſequences of it, a Queſtion of the greateſt Moment to us, in the Reſolution of which the Honour and Veracity of God are concern'd, and on which the Laws, the Meaſures and Event of our Actions, our eternal Happineſs or Miſery depend. To refuſe it our moſt ſerious Conſideration, or to reſiſt the Evidence of its Proofs, muſt be fatal to our Happineſs; muſt be a high Contempt of ſo awful a Meſſage, and an unpardonable Diſregard to that Sacred Majeſty, in whoſe Name it is propoſed.

But the Circumſtance of greateſt Aggravation in this Crime, is the Motives it proceeds from. Could it, with any Reaſon, be preſumed, that the Infidels we contend with, were induced to oppoſe the Goſpel by a ſincere Love of Truth,

Truth, a Concern for the Honour of God, or the Happineſs of Mankind, ſuch laudable Motives might, in ſome Meaſure, excuſe their Incredulity. One of the greateſt Apoſtles of our Religion tells us, that he himſelf not only deny'd, but perſecuted this Faith, which he afterwards preach'd. But the Integrity of his Zeal alleviated the Miſtake of it, and recommended him to the Compaſſion of God. And could theſe Gentlemen pretend to act under the ſame Diſadvantages, and be influenced by the ſame Motives that he was, they might, with ſome Reaſon, hope to obtain the ſame Mercy from God that he found. Could they plead, as He might, that the Evidences of the Goſpel had never been diſtinctly offer'd to them, that their Disbelief of it proceeded from their Reverence to a former acknowledg'd Revelation, in which they were confirm'd by the Authority of their proper Teachers, and all the Prejudices of Education, this might be allow'd ſomething in Mitigation of the Crime. But alas! in their Caſe, there is no Colour for any of theſe Pleas.

They cannot pretend Ignorance in the midſt of Light. The Evidences of Chriſtianity lie all open before them, and they are even prepoſſeſs'd in their Favour by all the Influences of Education and Authority. Neither an Affection for Truth, neither Zeal for God, nor Charity for Men can give us any rational Account of their Conduct. But (as it appear'd to us upon Examination) the real Cauſe of their rejecting and oppoſing the Goſpel, is an Attachment to thoſe Vices it forbids. *They love Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds are evil.* Their Infidelity is the miſerable Refuge of ſuch Crimes, as right Reaſon and natural Conſcience condemn. They cannot bear the Reproofs of our Religion, and therefore will not own its Authority. Now to reject a divine Revelation ſo fully propoſed, and ſo evidently proved, as the Goſpel, upon ſuch Motives as theſe, argues an impious Hatred and Defiance of God; a Diſpoſition of Soul ſo alienated from Truth and Virtue, ſo apoſtate from Good, and ſo abandon'd to Evil,

Evil, as cannot but provoke, and deſerve, the utmoſt Indignation from the Juſtice, the Holineſs, and the Majeſty of God.

SINCE, then, the rejecting the Goſpel of *Jeſus Chriſt*, is a Crime heighten'd by ſo many Aggravations, ſo utterly incapable of any Mitigation or Excuſe, from the Circumſtances of the Perſons guilty of it: We are in Juſtice bound to affirm the Sentence of Condemnation here pronounced by our Saviour; and confeſs, in the Words of the Pſalmiſt, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and juſt are thy Judgments; for the Teſtimonies, which thou haſt commanded, are exceeding righteous and true* *.

PERMIT me, then, to recollect and apply, what has occurr'd to us in the preceding Reflections. And,

* Pſalm cxix. 161, 162.

1ſt. SINCE *Light is come into the World;* ſince the Goſpel appears by ſuch evident Proofs to be a divine Revelation, let us rejoice in this Light, and adore the infinite Compaſſion of God, who has vouchſafed this ineſtimable Favour to us miſerable Sinners, *who ſate in Darkneſs and the Shadow of Death.* And let it confirm our Faith and Perſeverance in this holy Religion, to obſerve, how precarious and unſupported thoſe Objections are, which the Skill or Malice of its Enemies have been able to raiſe againſt it; how inconſiſtent with their own Conduct in other Caſes; how deſtructive of the common Principles of Reaſoning, and Meaſures of Truth.

2ly. SINCE the corrupt Intereſts of Luſt and Paſſion, are proved to be the real and only Motives, that provoke Men to reſiſt and oppoſe the Light of the Goſpel, we cannot but reflect with Abhorrence on a Crime, ſo baſe in its Principles, and ſo pernicious in its Conſequences

ſequences to our preſent, as well as future, Happineſs. For if, even under the Reſtraints of Religion, we have ſo many Occaſions of Complaint from the ungovern'd Luſts of wicked Men, how dreadful an Abode, what a Scene of Horror and Confuſion would our Land become, if all Bonds of Conſcience and Religion were taken off, and every Man were left to act as his Paſſions ſhall ſuggeſt? And, yet, this is the very Scheme of the Infidel; this muſt be the Effect of its Succeſs; ſince, as we have ſeen, the only Motive by which he is determin'd himſelf, and by which he can prevail on others to concur with him, is an Impatience of the Reſtraints and Diſcipline of the Goſpel.

3ly. SINCE it alſo appear'd to us, that Sin, as 'tis the only, ſo 'tis a very effectual Motive to Infidelity; ſince it leads us on, by gradual and almoſt imperceptible Advances, from one Degree of Hardneſs and Impenitence to another, and can find no Reſt to its Fears, till it determines in reſolv'd Apoſtacy, let

us

us fly with trembling from this dreadful Evil. For, as the wiſe Man ſays, it will *bite like a Serpent, ſting like an Adder* * : Tho' the Wound at firſt appears but ſmall and inconſiderable, yet the Poiſon, infuſed with it, will ſpread itſelf inſenſibly thro' the Soul, till it deſtroys the very Vitals of our Religion. We may, perhaps, for a Time, by ſome little palliating Arts, ſuſpend this fatal Conſequence of Sin, and ſhift off deciding that great Queſtion, Whether we will ſerve God, or ſerve him not : But this we muſt at laſt be forced to reſolve. An Indulgence to Sin, and the Acknowledgment of the Goſpel are, in their Nature, ſo perfectly irreconcileable, that, if ever we ſeriouſly reflect on the Event of our Actions, we ſhall find ourſelves under a Neceſſity of renouncing the one, or the other. And if the Luſt has eſtabliſh'd its Dominion over the Soul, and will not be refuſed its habitual Gratifications, 'tis eaſily ſeen, it muſt preſide in the Debate, and will

* Prov. xxiii. 32.

deter-

determine againſt Religion. Let us then mortify betimes every corrupt Deſire, while there is yet ſome ſpiritual Life and Strength in the Soul. Set a Watch on all our Appetites, and ſuppreſs every Inclination to offend. And to this Reſolution it muſt eſpecially quicken us, to reflect

4ly. On the Condemnation here pronounced by our Lord, on all who deliberately reject his Goſpel. A Sin againſt the Goodneſs, the Truth, and the Authority of God; A Sin againſt the cleareſt Light, and all the Motives that can influence a reaſonable Nature; upon which, therefore, God will aſſuredly do Honour to his Juſtice, in the moſt ſevere Inflictions. And I cannot but ſuggeſt one Conſideration of great Terror to the Infidel, and of equal Support to the Chriſtian, That ſuppoſing, in the Event of Things, the Goſpel ſhould prove an Impoſture, as the Infidel pretends; yet the Arguments, upon which we believe it, are ſo fair and concluſive, the Miracles that ſupport its di-

divine Authority, ſo well atteſted, and in their Nature ſuch evident Proofs of God's Approbation; and the Morality it preſcribes ſo pure and excellent, that our Submiſſion to it cannot be imputed to us as a Crime. He who believes and obeys it, may appeal to the ſtricteſt Judge, with a juſt Confidence that he has done all that could be required from a rational Creature: That he has aſſented to nothing, but what carried the faireſt Marks and Characters of Truth, nor done any Thing but what right Reaſon aſſured him was his, and every honeſt Man's, Duty; which, therefore, a juſt and upright God cannot puniſh. But, on the contrary, if the Goſpel be, as we firmly believe it is, a divine Revelation, the Infidel who rejects it is eternally, irrecoverably loſt, and ruin'd. His Crime admits no Excuſe, no extenuating Plea, which can offer itſelf to the Compaſſion of the Judge.

How alas! will he appear? With what Aſtoniſhment will he come forth, in the Day when he ſhall ſee that deſpiſed

ſpiſed *Galilean*, the meek and holy *Jeſus*, whoſe Name he has blaſphemed, whoſe Altars he has profaned, whoſe Religion, Laws, and Servants have been the Scorn of his wanton Railleries, exalted now in the Majeſty of his Kingdom, Angels, Authorities, and Powers being made ſubject unto him? With what Confuſion will he behold Him ſeated on his Throne of Judgment, and the Fate of every Creature ſuſpended on his Sentence? When he ſhall ſee the Heavens and the Earth paſs away at his Word, and every Jot and Tittle of that Goſpel he deſpiſed, confirm'd, and fulfill'd? With what Agonies of Guilt and Deſpair, muſt he approach the offended Preſence, and hear that terrible Sentence from his Judge, —— *Thoſe mine Enemies who would not that I ſhould reign over them, bring them out and ſlay them before me* *.

Let us then prepare ourſelves for that Day, by a ſteady Perſeverance in

* Luke xix. 27.

the

the Faith and Duties of our Religion. Then ſhall we able to meet with Joy that Redeemer in whom we have believ'd, and receive the Reward promiſed to our Faith, *even the Salvation of our Souls.*

FINIS.

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